



WAY OF CHOICES

BOOK 08

Mao Ni

Epub creation by Lisa Hayes

Way of Choices

(Ze Tian ji)

(择天记)

by

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Synopsis

To pick is to choose. This is a story about choices. Three thousand worlds full of gods and demons, with a daoist scroll in your hand, you are able to control the entire universe...

At the beginning of time, a mystical meteor came crashing down from outer space and scattered all over the world. A piece of it landed in the Eastern Continent. There were mysterious totems carved upon the meteor. Through viewing these totems, mankind comprehended the Dao and established the Orthodoxy.

Several thousand years later, the fourteen years old orphan Chen Changsheng left his master to cure his illness and change his fate. He brought a part of a marriage vow with him to the capital, thus beginning the journey of a rising hero...

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Chapter 701 – A Story about a City and a Blade (I)

Snowflakes drifted down from the sky, falling upon Tie Shu's temples and clothes, yet they could not truly touch him. With extremely soft swishes, they were sliced into countless pieces, countless small flowers blooming in the air.

This man seemed to be made of iron, even colder than the wind and snow. Hidden under his clothes was a sharpness more frightening than even blades or spears.

Wang Po walked to the table, glanced at him, and then sat down, serenely placing his blade on the table.

His movements were very steady and light. They made no noise, as silent as the falling snowflakes.

Snowflakes also fell on his temples, then rolled off or lightly stuck. They also fell on his blade, gradually covering it like fallen yellowed leaves, revealing not even a hint of sharpness.

At this sight, Tie Shu's indifferent expression slowly began to change. He was not growing more wary or solemn, but sorrowful.

In Tanzhe Temple, when he had closed his eyes amongst a world of yellowed leaves, just like now, he had seen a similar sight.

He looked at the Wang Po of now, but in his eyes was the figure of that youth clothed in hemp walking out of Wenshui City.

"Today, I might be talking a bit more than usual."

He said to Wang Po.

Wang Po looked through the wind and snow at the courtyard, his meaning clear.

With an indifferent expression, Tie Shu said, "It is impossible for Chen Changsheng to succeed, so I have a very long time."

Wang Po had a different view, but it was precisely because of this that he naturally did not mind sitting for a while.

"Senior, please speak."

"Back when you left Wenshui City, many people went to see you."

At these words, Wang Po's drooping brows slightly rose and then descended.

As the final male descendant of the Wang clan of Tianliang, if he were to die, the Wang clan would truly be destroyed.

Emperor Taizong's joke would become the truth.

Thus, ever since he was a child, he hid all over the place. With the assistance of the Liang Household and some old and warmhearted senior cultivators, he was able to mature with great difficulty.

The power of the Zhu clan was too great, especially after Wang Po came to be known as a cultivating genius. The situation he faced became even more dangerous, but it was right at that point that the Tang Old Master sent someone to bring him into Wenshui City.

In Wenshui, he worked for several years as an accountant, under the Tang clan's protection.

Several years later, he decided to leave Wenshui. The Tang Old Master also agreed with his decision.

This news very swiftly spread to all corners of the continent.

That Wang Po dared to leave Wenshui and cast aside the protection of Tang clan signified that after his several years of life as an accountant, he had matured enough to develop sufficient self-confidence. As long as Zhu Luo was prevented by the oath of the starry sky from personally taking action and the Imperial Court did not move the army or its great experts, it would be very difficult to kill him.

Everyone knew that Wang Po was already very strong, but just how strong was he?

On the day he left Wenshui City, many people went to the official road outside the city, including several great personages.

Everyone clearly understood that whether it was the Zhu clan, the Emotion-Severing Sect, or the Imperial Court, they were all certain to attack Wang Po. Trouble was sure to occur outside of Wenshui City on that day.

"I also went," Tie Shu said, looking into his eyes.

This was the first time Wang Po learned of this matter. "I'm surprised."

Logically speaking, all he was back then was a young cultivation genius with quite a lot of potential. It would have been very difficult for him to alarm an expert of the Divine Domain like Tie Shu.

"This is because after Su Li met you in Wenshui City, he made an assessment. No one else knew, but people like us were naturally able to find out."

Tie Shu continued, "He said that in the future, your blade would assuredly be stronger than those of the past."

Wang Po did not reply to this comment.

Even he, in the face of such praise, could only keep his silence.

To a person like Su Li, only one user of the blade from the past was worth particularly mentioning. Naturally, that person was Zhou Dufu.

"So I believed that your death on that day was certain."

Tie Shu continued to look at him as he spoke.

This conclusion seemed unreasonable, but it was actually the right and proper judgment.

After such high praise from Su Li, how could the powerful figures of the Imperial Court and Tianliang County possibly allow him to continue to grow?

Wang Po recalled the scene when he walked out of Wenshui City all those years ago, his brows gradually rising.

He did not feel satisfaction and pride upon recalling glorious memories, only that after so many years, he still found it difficult to forget the killing intent that soared to the heavens on that day.

"I saw you, one man with one blade, walk out of Wenshui City, just like today."

Tie Shu continued, "Many people died, but you survived. At that

time, we all knew that the Zhu clan and the Imperial Court had met a very troublesome problem. Looking at it now, Zhu Luo knew it even more clearly, so there was the dark rain in Xunyang City, his final words and wish before the Mausoleum of Books."

Wang Po calmly said, "I don't feel that being highly regarded by him is any sort of honor."

Tie Shu answered, "But he was still Zhu Luo. It was the only request he made before his death, so we must help him carry it out."

Wang Po's gaze seemed to slightly drop, falling upon the metal blade that was covered in snow.

"Of course, as I watched you come over, I was also very sad. I have no desire to kill you."

Tie Shu said, "But you should not have entered the capital. That is seeking your own death."

Wang Po once more recalled the past and also felt a sense of melancholy. He brushed at his sleeves, letting the snow drift to the ground.

He tidied his clothes naturally so that he could wield his blade.

With an apathetic expression, Tie Shu asked, "You must kill today?"

Wang Po did not answer this question. "In truth, I'm very curious about just who in this world is able to make you suddenly change your mind."

All was quiet, the snow still noiselessly falling.

The sorrow and melancholy Tie Shu felt in the past was all real.

But what he spoke today was fake.

From Tanzhe Temple to today, his heart had always been set on killing Wang Po.

Wang Po understood this very well.

But Tie Shu's meaning just now was also very clear. As long as Wang Po was willing to leave the capital, Tie Shu would not attack.

Just who had made him change his mind from killing to driving away?

Wang Po would not leave, but he truly wished to know the answer.

Not any normal person of power could influence the mind of an expert of the Divine Domain.

Surveying the entire world, there were probably no more than five such people.

With a creak, the door of a tea house on the side of the street opened.

A very handsome man walked out and smiled at Wang Po. "Long time no see."

With this person's appearance, Wang Po's raised brows slowly drooped back down. "So it was...Second Master."

This handsome man was once the most renowned hedonist of Wenshui City, but later faded into obscurity.

Only the people of the Wenshui Tangs knew how terrifying this person was.

The Tang Second Master.

When Wang Po lived with the Wenshui Tangs, did he know of this matter?

It had actually been the Wenshui Tangs.

And it was only the Wenshui Tangs that had still had a chance of changing the mind of a great personage like Tie Shu, even under

the pressure of the Imperial Court and Shang Xingzhou.

The Tang Second Master smiled at Wang Po and said, "Since you know it's me, do you still persist?"

This man was truly very handsome, but perhaps because the wind and snow curled about him, he seemed to give off a faint aura of cold and gloom.

Wang Po did not reply.

The Tang Second Master continued to smile as he asked, "'Kindness weighty as mountains', is that four words?"

Wang Po fell silent, then answered, "Correct."

The Tang Second Master dropped his mouth in a laugh, seemingly ecstatic, but no noise came from his mouth.

In the wind and snow, he looked rather horrifying.

Then, his smile gradually faded, and he expressionlessly said to Wang Po, "Today, you are not allowed to unsheathe your blade."

Chapter 702 – A Story about a City and a Blade (II)

The streets were covered in a thin layer of snow, and upon this snow was a distinct trail of footsteps.

Chen Changsheng had already walked to the end of the street. With a turn to the right, he would be at the alley of the Northern Military Department.

Ten-some zhang away, he could see a wall. Behind this wall was that courtyard.

No noise had come from behind him.

Not the sounds of blades or fighting.

But his mind was not affected in the slightest.

Because he believed in Wang Po.

As long as Wang Po was behind him, even if Wang Po's opponent was a legendary expert like Tie Shu, he only needed to keep looking forward.

At the wall and the courtyard behind it.

A wind stirred, its howls somewhat grating on his ears.

The thin snow upon the streets was rolled up and the snow upon the roofs of both sides of the street fell down.

The howl of the wind blowing every which way was very normal.

A figure burst from the snow.

A sword flew from this figure and stabbed at Chen Changsheng's forehead.

Even though they were still separated by several zhang, Chen Changsheng could sense the sharpness and aura of death upon this sword.

He slightly narrowed his eyes, not because of this sword, but because of the figure wielding it.

Faint specks of light could be seen flickering in and out of the snow that had been sent flying.

This assassin who had concealed himself in the snow for so long did not seem to be amongst the flying snow, but in another world.

This was because this assassin had his own world. Those specks of light were proof.

The first enemy Chen Changsheng encountered today was a Star Condensation Realm assassin.

A Star Condensation cultivator could lord over the provinces, become the elder of any sect. Just which one would be willing to become an assassin that couldn't be revealed under the light?

An assassin of this level was an extremely rare sight.

Even the Department for Purging Officials would not have too many.

Only one place in the continent possessed so many.

It was a very obscure organization of assassins. Su Li had once been a member.

No one knew the origins or location of this organization of assassins.

But Chen Changsheng knew.

In reality, this assassin organization was completely subordinate to the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets.

From the moment he saw this Star Condensation assassin and recognized their very familiar assassination style, he was sure of their origins.

The Imperial Court had truly succeeded in subduing the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets.

Chen Changsheng was not shocked, but he began to worry about Liu Qing.

Then, he put his attention on his eyes, focused his heart, and retreated.

With just a simple retreat, the gloomy and cold sword concealed within the wind and snow missed.

The moment his shoes pressed against the thin snow, the Stainless Sword emerged from the Vault Sheath with a clang.

With wind and snow obscuring his sight, it was impossible for him tell the location of the assassin.

But his eyes remained fixed on a certain place in the snow, showing no hesitation.

The sword intent of the Stainless Sword swiftly and forcefully followed his gaze.

Squelch.

A spurt of blood sprayed into the flying snow.

The assassin was forced out by his sword intent and swiftly flew backward until he crashed into the wall of the courtyard.

The snow atop the wall tumbled down onto the assassin's face and then was washed away by spurting blood.

A deep and bloody hole had appeared on the assassin's throat.

His eyes were filled with confusion and despair.

He could not understand how Chen Changsheng had been able to see through his position.

Even if he could see it, how had his sword been able to so effortlessly destroy his Star Domain?

Chen Changsheng was naturally able to destroy this assassin's Star Domain.

Because he used the Intellectual Sword and had a pair of intelligent eyes.

The current him had true essence as strong and solid as a mountain, a spiritual sense as serene and pliable as an ocean, and his swordplay had reached a most superb level.

His current level of cultivation might still be lacking compared to

those true experts, but his understanding of the sword and his insight had already reached that high level.

From a certain perspective, he could look down upon opponents of the same level.

This assassin had also been at the Star Condensation Realm, but his cultivation was not comparable, and his assassination methods were inherited from Su Li and Liu Qing...how could he have possibly blocked Chen Changsheng's sword?

Blood seeped into the snow, churned into a rather vile slurry. The assassin slid down from the wall and died.

Chen Changsheng continued forward.

His footsteps were still steady and flat, his expression still serene, and he seemed very cautious.

One strike had slain one powerful enemy. In the end, it had still consumed no small amount of energy. More importantly, he knew that the battle had only just begun.

The Imperial Court had subdued the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets, so there would assuredly be more experts within the courtyard than he had first calculated.

He was not Zhou Dufu, nor was he Su Li, and right now, he could just barely see Wang Po's back, so there was no way he could be

called 'invincible'.

On that night, he had been able to invade this courtyard and assault Zhou Tong until his soul almost fled his body because he held the advantage of surprise. Today, it would naturally not be so simple.

He knew that he was bound to encounter opponents that he could not defeat today, and these were the problems that he needed to address.

In the end, he was still just too young. He had only cultivated for three years, and there were no small number of experts in the world who could rely purely on their strength to crush him, leaving no chance for his insight and understanding of the sword to show their use.

Like Zhou Tong, who would no longer look down on him or permit any surprise to occur.

Like those powerful men on the upper rankings of the Proclamation of Liberation.

Like Xiao De who had appeared in front of him right now.

Ranked fifth on the Proclamation of Liberation, the number one expert of the demi-human's middle generation, Xiao De.

When Xiao De saw Chen Changsheng walk out of the snow, a

faint glimmer of respect appeared in his eyes, unlike the disdain and contempt of their first meeting at Mount Han.

"Today, I will send you off well."

Chen Changsheng knew that during the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, Xiao De and Xiao Zhang had played very important roles in the Imperial Palace. He should not have been surprised that Xiao De would be invited by the Imperial Court to deal with him, but he was still rather surprised. The diplomatic mission from White Emperor City was still in the capital. From any angle, Xiao De should not have come out, unless...

He suddenly felt the chill of the snow and wind all the more keenly.

There was still no sound from the street, not that of blades or fighting. Wang Po had still not unsheathed his blade.

Countless figures appeared in the snow, all of them experts. Presumably, even more assassins and killers were hidden in the shadows.

Chen Changsheng silently gazed at the courtyard right before his eyes.

He understood.

The courtyard was so close, but it wasn't a given that he could

enter it today.

At this moment, he could only see a few parts of the courtyard, like the white line running along the top of the wall and the crabapple tree poking out above it.

The crabapple tree had already shed all its leaves. Its naked branches burdened by snow seemed rather ragged and cold.

A deathly stillness.

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When the Tang Second Master gave his noiseless laughs, he would seem rather comical.

But in the view of his opponents, his face at these moments would seem particularly terrifying.

When the Tang Second Master's smile faded and he was without expression, he was at his coldest and gloomiest, his face like a corpse.

Wang Po looked at this face that he had not seemed for many years, this unforgettable, comical, terrifying, gloomy, and ugly face. Suddenly, he had a fierce desire.

When he was working as an accountant in Wenshui City, he would often get this sort of desire, but because of those four words, he had always endured.

'Kindness weighty as mountains' was truly four words.

The Wenshui Tangs had treated him with a kindness as weighty as mountains.

And then when this mountain collapsed before him, what could he do?

Wang Po had never considered this question before.

His blade was straight, and his view of this world was also straight.

If there was revenge, it must be taken, and if there was kindness, it must be repaid. There was no need to think about such simple matters.

Until today, when he heard the Tang Second Master's words.

"You are not allowed to unsheathe your blade."

His brows drooped and he seemed very distressed. "Whose intention is this?"

The Tang Second Master understood his question. "Naturally, it's the Old Master's intention."

Wang Po looked at him and did not speak.

The Tang Second Master mocked, "If it was my intention, why would I stop you? I would let you die at Tie Shu's hands with utter delight."

Wang Po considered this and replied, "That's true."

The Tang Second Master explained, "But the Old Master likes you like he loves his grandson. He doesn't want you to die, so he had me come and say that."

Wang Po fell silent again.

"Just now, you almost certainly thought our Tang clan was intending to force the repayment of kindness, a truly shameless act." The Tang Second Master stared into his eyes, making no effort to conceal the malice within his own. "Now you realize that the Tang clan is actually protecting your life. Do you not feel very sad that you can't look down on us merchants?"

Wang Po calmly looked back and said, "Since you want me to die, we can pretend you didn't even say those words."

"Although I want to you die, I don't want you to just die like this. There's no value in that."

The Tang Second Master lightly jeered, "I don't care what the Old Master thinks. I only know that my Tang clan paid a great price for you, so you are the property of my Tang clan, a business that my Tang clan invested in. Even if you want to die, you have to bring back enough money for my Tang clan. How could I let you die for such an absurd reason?"

There was no such thing as heroes or everlasting justice.

Truly absurd.

If you want to die, your death should have value. How could you mess around with that little child?

Then what did it mean to have value?

Wang Po understood.

The position of Pope was the most valuable thing in the world.

After going around and advancing bit by bit, at the end, it was still about that matter.

This day of first snow over the capital was, in the view of many, the day that he and Chen Changsheng went to kill Zhou Tong.

But in the view of others, it was the day when Chen Changsheng went to die.

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Chapter 703 – A Story about a City and a Blade (II)

Wang Po understood.

He and Chen Changsheng wanted to kill Zhou Tong.

The other side wanted to kill him and Chen Changsheng.

The Wenshui Tang clan's choice, due to their different stances towards him and Chen Changsheng, had deviated somewhat.

But there were still two matters that he did not understand.

If one treated the Tang clan as purely merchants who placed profit above all, why did they want Chen Changsheng to die?

Everyone knew that Chen Changsheng and Tang Tang were extremely close friends. Chen Changsheng's becoming the next Pope would present enormous benefits for the Tang clan.

"White Emperor City also does not agree with Chen Changsheng's becoming the next Pope. This is also a question that many people do not understand."

The Tang Second Master explained, "That is because White Emperor City has an even better choice. However, it's true that Chen Changsheng is the best choice for my Tang clan, but for me,

it's the worst choice."

The one Chen Changsheng had a good relationship with was Tang Tang, not the Wenshui Tangs, and even less the Tang Second Master.

Wang Po asked, "This being the case, why did the Old Master listen to you?"

The Tang Second Master said, "You know that the Old Master detested the Divine Empress. What Chen Changsheng did greatly displeased the Old Master."

At this moment, a clear hum of a sword was heard from the snow and wind at the end of the street, followed by the shining of sword glows.

Chen Changsheng's figure flickered in and out of the snow.

With a groan, a bloody odor penetrated through the snow and came to where they were seated.

The battle on that side had already begun, but Wang Po's blade was still on the table, unmoving.

Wang Po drew his gaze back and placed it back on the blade still drowned in snow. "You can't even wait ten-some days?"

The entire continent knew that the Pope's illness was growing more and more serious. As autumn transformed to winter, as the season came to a close, the final ten-some days had come.

Even if the Great Zhou Imperial Court, White Emperor City, and the Wenshui Tang clan wanted to snatch away the seat of the Pope, why could they not wait ten-some days?

"His Holiness the Pope is a Saint. When he dies, thunder and lightning will follow, and he will have plans for the aftermath."

The Tang Second Master continued, "What we want to do is throw his plans into disorder by using the simplest method, resolving what might be the most complicated of matters in the future."

Even if the Pope returned to the sea of stars and the entire world knew of his plans, who would dare oppose his final decree?

Once the Orthodoxy's will united into an impregnable fortress, even someone as powerful as Shang Xingzhou or as scheming as the Wenshui Tangs would find it very challenging to drive Chen Changsheng from the Li Palace.

To kill Chen Changsheng ahead of time was undoubtedly many times simpler than acting against him once he was seated on the throne of the Pope.

At this moment, this seemed like the most accurate answer to

this problem, but before this appearance of this solution, no one had thought of it before.

No one would have thought that just before the Pope was about to leave the world, Shang Xingzhou would not only lack the patience to wait, but would even choose, before the Pope had even left the world...to strike.

"Who decided this?" Wang Po asked the Tang Second Master.

The Tang Second Master smiled. "It was naturally the decision of the esteemed master of the Dao. I just offered my own wisdom at the appropriate juncture."

Wang Po looked into his eyes and said, "After so many years, you still like to play around with these tricks."

"Right, because that's what I'm good at," the Tang Second Master indifferently proclaimed, his smile vanishing.

Many years ago, the current Principal of the Heavenly Dao Academy, Zhuang Zhihuan, met him in Wenshui.

From then until now, Zhuang Zhihuan had always been startled by the Tang Second Master's talent in cultivation, but he was even more startled at how it had been wasted.

In the entire world, only the Old Master of the Tang clan roughly understood why he cared so little for his precious talent, giving it

up like it was a pair of worn-out shoes.

Because no matter how high his talent, he could not reach higher than Wang Po, and no matter how diligently he cultivated, he could not surpass Wang Po.

Many years ago, he unwillingly and despairingly recognized this fact.

Thus, the Tang Second Master who once had limitless future prospects became the tyrannical hedonist of Wenshui City, gradually fading into obscurity.

No one knew that he had only given up on cultivation. In silence, he had placed all his efforts in another aspect, well aware that only this way could he defeat Wang Po.

In wisdom, strategy, unfeeling schemes, and judging and using people's minds.

"In terms of fighting, I might not be able to reach you for the rest of my life.

"But in other aspects, you don't even have the right to carry my shoes.

"I understand the clearest what each person cares about or wants, what thresholds they can't pass, where the shadows they can't see are.

"Everyone says that Wang Po's path of the blade is straight. You sell your straightness to seek fame, so what you care about the most is naturally fame.

"Today, I used the fame that you desire to suppress your blade, so what can you do?"

The Tang Second Master looked at Wang Po and laughed.

Just as he usually did, he opened his mouth but issued no noise.

Every word that had just come from his mouth was a jeer or taunt aimed at Wang Po.

Wang Po looked at his face, and that desire, that impulse, grew more and more intense.

But how could he do it?

He was not a person who sold his straightness in pursuit of fame.

But kindness was as weighty as a mountain.

This mountain was crushing him. Could he cut through it with a single blade?

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Madam Mu walked out of the hall and raised her head to the sky.

Snow was currently falling from the sky. Snow fell from the clouds, but regardless of what bystanders saw, in her eyes, the snow and clouds were sheep that had white and soft wool.

Wherever her gaze fell, the snowflakes would scatter and the clouds would gradually move, [sheep being herded](#).

As he saw this sight, Mao Qiuyu's expression grew abnormally solemn, his two sleeves moving despite the lack of wind.

She drew back her gaze and looked to some place at the side of the hall. A slightly chilly smile appeared on her face as she asked, "Was my younger sister punished by you here?"

Besides Empress of the Demi-humans, she had another identity: Chief Princess of the Great Western Continent. Her younger sister was a once-Prefect of the Orthodoxy—Mu Jiushi.

Back when Shang Xingzhou had wanted to expel Chen Changsheng from the Orthodoxy and pushed forward Mu Jiushi as successor to the Pope, the matter had naturally been closely related to Madam Mu.

Contrary to expectations, Mao Qiuyu actually grew calm at this question, his two sleeves lightly wafting in the breeze.

The snow in front of the hall was taken up by the wind and sent in all directions, heedlessly scattering into the shadows of the various halls and palaces, revealing several figures.

Daoist Baishi.

Linghai Zhiwang.

An Lin.

Daoist Siyuan.

The five Prefects, the strongest powers of the Orthodoxy, had all arrived.

And this place was the Li Palace.

Even if she was a Saint, she was not able to act freely and without rival.

Let alone the fact that though the Pope was extremely ill, he was still the Pope.

Mao Qiuyu looked at her and sternly asked, "Empress, do you truly wish to treat my Orthodoxy as an enemy?"

"My view is different from Yin's, so I am treating the Orthodoxy as an enemy?" she calmly asked. "Can Shang not represent the Orthodoxy?"

Mao Qiuyu, Linghai Zhiwang and the other Prefects did not seem affected, but their Dao hearts had already chilled.

They knew that if matters today were carried out with just the slightest lack of propriety, the Orthodoxy was highly likely to confront the greatest internal strife since the Holy Maiden went south.

Shang Xingzhou was also a legitimate successor of the Orthodoxy, and also the Pope's senior brother. One thousand years ago, he had lived in the Li Palace.

From a certain perspective, after the Pope's death, it was him that was best able to represent the Orthodoxy.

Madam Mu's meaning with her question was plain to see.

The snowstorm over the Li Palace suddenly intensified.

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The snowstorm over the Imperial Palace suddenly intensified.

The western wind rolled up snowflakes and pelted against the side door of a palace hall.

The door was pushed open, but the snow and wind were unable to enter, as Shang Xingzhou was walking out.

In order to subdue the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets and stabilize the court for His Majesty in the shortest amount of time, he had paused for many days within this room.

Today, he walked out.

He was prepared to leave the palace.

He wanted to go to the Li Palace.

Ten-some Daoists of profound cultivation level walked out of the snow and followed behind him.

(TN: Mu 牧, Madam Mu's surname, and the surname of all other members of the Great Western Continent's Imperial clan, means 'herding')

Chapter 704 – The Desire of a Metal Blade (I)

Shang Xingzhou was not able to walk out of the Imperial Palace.

His will was like a torrential flood on the verge of overflowing out of the capital and drowning the entire world, wanting to swallow up Chen Changsheng and leave nothing behind.

Right now, someone stood before him.

The Pope was still in the Li Palace, Wang Po was still sitting by the table, Xu Yourong was at South Stream Temple, the young women of South Stream Temple had been barred within the Orthodox Academy by Priest Xin, Tang Thirty-Six was in Wenshui, and Zhexiu had vanished.

The person who stood up was completely unexpected, but when carefully considered, also someone who should have been expected to stand up.

Yu Ren stood in the wind and snow, the eunuchs and maids around him kneeling on the ground.

For the first time, the young emperor defied the wishes of his teachers and ministers and appeared at a certain place.

It was a place that he had chosen for himself.

The wind blew his cloak about, but it could not blow about his eyes and face. His appearance was naturally as quiet and tranquil as usual.

The fury of the wind and snow was also a thing of nature.

He calmly gazed at his teacher.

Shang Xingzhou calmly gazed at him.

Unlike Chen Changsheng, Yu Ren was Shang Xingzhou's true successor, the one to which Shang Xingzhou had entrusted all his dreams.

Shang Xingzhou truly cherished him and was willing to sacrifice everything for his sake, to do everything for his benefit.

Yu Ren knew all this, so he was moved, then uneasy, then fearful.

In the past few days, he had been in the Imperial Palace learning how to become a wise sovereign, silently, fearfully.

He knew that his teacher was assuredly going to kill his junior brother.

In order to become a monarch hailed throughout the ages, his spirit could not have a single weakness. To put it another way, there could not be a single existence in the world that could sway

his will.

This was exactly what Shang Xingzhou wanted to ensure. He would not even permit himself to have such influence.

Chen Changsheng was able to do this, so he had to die.

Nobody understood.

The Great Western Continent did not understand, White Emperor City did not understand, the south did not understand, the Pope did not understand.

Only that old temple near Xining Village understood.

That morning on the Mausoleum of Books, Yu Ren saw his junior brother carry the Tianhai Divine Empress's body down from the mountain, saw his teacher come up the mountain, saw the two of them brush past each other like strangers, and he understood.

Thus, in the past few days within the Imperial Palace, he had been very obediently, diligently studying how to become a wise sovereign.

The more uneasy and fearful he felt, the more obedient and quiet he was, just like at Xining Village's old temple.

And yet his master still wanted to kill his junior brother.

Then his only recourse was to stand up and tell his master that this was not acceptable.

As he gazed at Yu Ren in the snow, Shang Xingzhou became increasingly stern and grave, his will to kill Chen Changsheng growing all the more resolute.

He wanted Chen Changsheng to die precisely because of this, and Yu Ren's standing here now was all the proof he needed. In his view, Chen Changsheng's death was even more necessary.

How could all this be stopped? How could one change the intentions of a person like Shang Xingzhou?

Yu Ren's hand gripped a jade pendant tied to his waist.

This jade pendant was made of green jade. It was completely transparent without the slightest impurity, and thus extremely rare and expensive.

There were no ripples of Qi emanating from this jade ornament, as it was not a magical artifact. It was just a gift offered by the Qiushan clan head to the new emperor when he had entered the palace a few days ago to seek an audience.

This gift almost perfectly symbolized the new emperor's mind.

At the time, in the palace, when Yu Ren took this jade pendant, he did not show any strange expressions, but his mind was perturbed.

He had not expected that someone in the world would actually be able to guess at his worries and unease, and even give him a way of resolving them.

He clearly understood that during Mount Li's internal strife, the person called Qiushan Jun who was equally as famous as his junior brother had once done something similar when confronting his father.

So when he confronted his master, perhaps he could do the same.

Shang Xingzhou's gaze pierced through the snow and fell upon the jade pendant in Yu Ren's hand.

He knew everything that went on in the palace, so he naturally knew the origins of this jade pendant.

He understood the intentions that Yu Ren wished to convey and thus fell silent.

The wind and snow blew without end, the snow gradually piling up in the plazas of the Imperial Palace. The eunuchs and maids kneeling on the floor and also the ten-some Daoists looked just like black dots.

After some time, Shang Xingzhou finally spoke.

"Just once," he said to Yu Ren. "Just this once."

Yu Ren very seriously nodded.

Shang Xingzhou followed, "But Your Majesty must understand—this is the capital, not Xining Village's old temple. This is a matter concerning the world, not just between teacher and disciples. He didn't forget to boil the water, cook a meal, or clean. If you want to suffer in his place, you can, and I don't need to punish him, but other people will carry out this matter for the heavens, and he will die all the same."

Yu Ren did not think so.

He knew that Madam Mu had gone to the Li Palace, that the supreme expert Tie Shu was guarding Zhou Prison, and there was even Xiao De, Xiao Zhang, and the Wenshui Tang clan.

But he still believed in Chen Changsheng.

Because Chen Changsheng was not alone. He had companions.

Yu Ren clearly understood that because of his influence, his junior brother didn't talk much or about anything very interesting. However, whether he went hunting in the mountains, to the stream to catch fish, or to the village to buy vegetables, he was always able to meet people willing to help. They were hunters or

fishermen, but all of them were people with kindness in their hearts.

Perhaps because they were martial brothers, they had always held a bit of indestructible kindness towards this world?

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The fighting at the end of the street suddenly ceased.

This did not mean the battle had concluded. One could clearly see that Chen Changsheng was still standing in the snowstorm.

Wang Po's fingers were very long and steady, especially when he gripped the hilt of his blade.

The thin snow crumbled away, revealing the true appearance of the blade. It was still sheathed, still hiding its sharpness.

But there was already a massive difference.

Earlier, this blade had been quietly placed on the table, but now it was gripped in his hand.

With this movement, many things changed.

The Tang Second Master's complexion became abnormally unsightly.

A flash of perturbation flickered across Tie Shu's eyes.

The Wenshui Tangs had taken out their kindness as weighty as a mountain, but it was still not enough to stay this person's blade?

"Do you dare strike me with your blade?"

The Tang Second Master stared into Wang Po's eyes, his voice even colder than the snow.

He represented the Wenshui Tangs, represented the Old Master, represented that mountain.

Wang Po stood up and replied, "I won't use my blade against you."

The Tang Second Master said nothing, knowing that there was more.

As expected.

"Because you are unworthy," Wang Po finished.

From Tanzhe Temple to the snowy street, from the yellow leaves to the wind and snow, Wang Po's blade had never once left its sheath during his time in the capital.

Everyone knew that he had comprehended the Dao of the blade, and was accumulating sharpness. This single blade of his was certain to shake the heavens and earth.

Who could possibly be worthy of receiving such a blade besides an expert of the Divine Domain?

When Wang Po said that the Tang Second Master was not worthy of this blade, this was no jeer, but the truth.

And the truth hurt the most.

The Tang Second Master's face turned nastier, but then he began to laugh.

This time, his laugh had noise. He roared with laughter that was full of derision.

The laughter suddenly vanished. He stared at Wang Po and icily said, "Whether I'm unworthy or you don't dare, if you don't unsheathe your blade, it's still impossible for you to resolve today's predicament."

This was also a truth. If Wang Po did not unsheathe his blade, how could he help Chen Changsheng?

What came next was Wang Po's answer.

He gripped his blade and waved it at the Tang Second Master.

Like the flick of a sleeve, brushing away dust, or driving some repulsive thing from one's sight, the action was very soft and very disdainful.

The Tang Second Master's eyes narrowed. He had not expected that Wang Po would actually strike at him. His true essence quickly began to circulate as he stepped into the snow and transformed into several afterimages shining with a golden light that escaped in all directions.

In these past few years, he did not cultivate as diligently as he had in the past, but he still possessed a shocking talent, was still a hand-picked descendant of the Tang clan. His strength remained, and his cultivation was quite high.

He used the Myriad Golden Leaves movement technique of the Wenshui Tang clan. With it, one could cross vast distances in a flash. This was a secret technique that not even Tang Thirty-Six had been able to learn, and although it did not compare to the marvels of the Yeshi Step, it was still very difficult to see through.

Countless chunks of snow flew into the air as Wang Po's metal blade descended.

The metal blade simply descended, yet it seemed to go through limitless changes.

Ultimately, however, nothing changed.

The metal blade drew a straight line through the wind and snow, simple and clear.

The front of this line accurately struck one of the afterimages in the golden light.

There was a clear pap, like the sound of a slap.

The Tang Second Master crashed into the snowy street.

His right cheek was completely red and blood oozed from the corner of his lips. A sense of utter disbelief filled his eyes.

Only after a few moments did he realize what had happened. He furiously roared at Wang Po, "You dared to hit me!"

Wang Po looked at him and did not speak.

The Tang Second Master spit out several teeth mixed with blood from his mouth.

He rubbed his face with a trembling hand, becoming even angrier

as he practically shrieked, "You actually dared to hit my face!"

"From the first time I saw you in Wenshui, I've always wanted to hit you."

Wang Po paused, then added, "And I've especially wanted to slap you in the face."

Chapter 705 – The Desire of a Metal Blade (II)

The Tang Second Master had a handsome face.

But when he made one of his habitually noiseless laughs, his face always seemed exaggerated and comical.

Wang Po did not like this way of laughing as he found it like a veil, concealing many emotions.

Many years ago, when he first went to Wenshui and met the Second Master at the Tang clan's ancestral shrine, he instantly disliked him.

At the time, the Tang Second Master saw the shabbily dressed Wang Po, slightly rolled his eyes, and noiselessly laughed. He looked at Wang Po like he was some stray dog on the road or some destitute relative taking shelter from the rain under a fence.

At the time, Wang Po saw his face and developed an intense impulse, a desire.

He wanted to wave the metal blade in his hand and smash the Tang Second Master's laughing face into pieces.

However, out of respect for the Tang Old Master, out of respect for his job as an accountant, he did not carry out this desire.

Thus, this desire remained at the bottom of his heart, yet even after many years, it did not weaken in the slightest.

This state persisted until today, when he saw the Tang Second Master walk out of the tea house and that handsome face once more make that shameless and voiceless laugh. Wang Po could no longer suppress this impulse.

Kindness was truly as weighty as a mountain, but his blade had hungered and thirsted for far too long.

Thus, he had waved his metal blade.

In Wenshui, when they were all still young, he was unable to smash apart the Tang Second Master's sneering smile. That was because he did not want to, because he was enduring.

Now, he no longer wanted to endure, he wanted to smash, so he naturally smashed.

It was truly difficult to trace the Tang clan's secret movement technique, the Myriad Golden Leaves. It was an extremely profound technique, but it was nothing in Wang Po's eyes.

On his second month in Wenshui, the Tang Second Master had gone to the accounting house and personally taught him this movement technique.

He did not need to unsheathe his blade. With his blade still in its sheath, he could still beat the Tang Second Master until he couldn't speak.

The Tang Second Master sat in the snow, his face covered in blood, his eyes burning with an indescribable loathing.

"My Tang clan wants to preserve your life...since you don't care and want to court death, go die then."

Wang Po had stood up, gripped his blade, and had even struck him. This naturally meant that he had refused the Wenshui Tang clan's request.

He wanted to kill Zhou Tong together with Chen Changsheng, so he had to fight a proper battle with Tie Shu.

"It hasn't even begun; how can you call it courting death?"

Wang Po looked at the Tang Second Master and said, "This is an aspect where you don't compare to me, Xun Mei, or Xiao Zhang."

In the opening of this young generation of blooming wildflowers, several extraordinary names had been written.

Wang Po, Xun Mei, Xiao Zhang, Liang Wangsun, Xiao De...

Very few people remembered that at the very beginning, there

was also someone with the surname 'Tang' on this list.

"All of them are like you, never able to catch up to me, whether in talent or destiny. But none of them gave up—none of them stopped chasing after me."

Wang Po's gaze rested on the end of the snowy street.

He knew that Xiao De was over there, and that Xiao Zhang might also appear.

Liang Wangsun had taken refuge in Xunyang City, and Xun Mei would no longer be able to appear.

"Cultivating the Dao and fighting are both the same: until the final moment is reached, success and failure cannot be decided. Ultimately, Xun Mei managed to catch up to me at the Mausoleum of Books. Xiao Zhang also still has a chance."

Wang Po returned his gaze to the Tang Second Master as he continued, "While you fought one match with me in Wenshui, felt that you would never be a match for me, and shifted to guessing at the human mind, studying how to scheme...that was an admission of defeat. From that moment on, you became trash, losing any hope of defeating me, becoming inferior to me for the rest of your life."

The Tang Second Master had a vacant gaze, seeming slightly at a loss.

Wang Po's voice was very calm, carrying no sense of deliberate scorn. It was a voice of cool and objective judgment.

But anyone would feel a certain way upon hearing these words, a feeling that they were being looked down upon.

Because written all over these words was the word 'invincible'.

This was an expert.

Against those opponents who also enjoyed a famous reputation, perhaps Wang Po had a somewhat higher cultivation, but it was not enough to crush them.

Such opponents included Xiao Zhang and Liang Wangsun.

However, in a true fight, he had never once lost, and would often gain victory through a crushing momentum.

This was because in terms of demeanor, will, mentality, and understanding of himself and this world, he was too far above them.

Tie Shu felt admiration and regret as he watched Wang Po.

Talented people appeared out of the rivers and hills with each generation, each with their own works that would last for decades,

but which of these experts would be able to establish such dominance over their peers, to possess such an imposing demeanor?

And this wasn't even considering the fact that in these decades over which the young generation of blooming wildflowers persisted, countless cultivators overflowing with talent had surged out like bamboo shoots after a rain.

Yet Wang Po had relied on just his single blade to suppress these experts and geniuses until they found it hard to breathe, difficult to stand out.

No one else besides Zhou Dufu had been able to accomplish something similar.

Admiration and regret ultimately led to the entire world growing wary and uneasy.

This was why Zhu Luo was willing to offer his death so that Wang Po would die.

Since Wang Po was not intending to take the Wenshui Tang clan's advice, Tie Shu would naturally kill Wang Po, and was even in somewhat of a hurry to do so.

Just as he had wanted to do in Tanzhe Temple.

Because it was only now that he, or Bie Yanghong, or Wuqiong

Bi, still had the ability to kill Wang Po.

If they were just a tad too slow, if just a few more days passed, if snow were to fall another one or two times, what would happen?

In another few days, after another two periods of snow, maybe they would already be unable to kill Wang Po.

This sort of awareness truly made one uneasy.

Even the starry sky that encapsulated the world would shudder in unease.

At that time, would a second Zhou Dufu appear in the human world?

No, even if it was just an assumption, it could not be allowed to happen.

Tie Shu looked at Wang Po and said, "My apologies."

There were many reasons he should apologize, whether it was the oath to the starry skies, the strong bullying the weak, the old bullying the young, or the death of a future giant of humanity.

Wang Po did not respond to his apology, as in his view, his loss in today's battle was not guaranteed.

Yes, perhaps the entire continent did not believe that he could win, even if he was Wang Po.

However, he himself believed it was possible.

Because the dark rain that had fallen over Xunyang City had been very swift, the fallen leaves of Tanzhe Temple had been very beautiful, layer after layer of winter willows grew by the Luo River, and all this had been like a fog, yet it was impossible for any of them to obscure his eyes.

Wang Po raised his blade and pointed it at Tie Shu, his actions steady and simple.

But his blade slightly shuddered.

It was not fear, but a desire for battle, the courage to challenge.

Many days had passed since Tanzhe Temple, and he had still not unsheathed his blade once.

Anyone could tell that this blade would be the strongest blade he had struck with in his life.

He was separated from Tie Shu by a single table. Logically speaking, this raised blade should have touched Tie Shu's clothes.

However, when he raised the blade, they seemed to be separated

by a vast river, the distance between them enormous. It was simply impossible for the blade to touch Tie Shu's clothes.

Was this enormous distance between the mortal world and the Divine Domain?

Would his metal blade be able to disregard this distance and fall above the starry sky?

Nobody knew.

Before Wang Po unsheathed his blade, the possibilities were limitless.

When he unsheathed his blade, the limitless possibilities would collapse into a single truth.

The entire world was waiting to see this single truth, not knowing just who would find themselves unable to endure this truth.

At this moment, Tie Shu made a choice.

This choice was very simple, but it represented an experience spanning centuries.

He chose to strike.

He would not let Wang Po unsheathe his blade.

He decided to not give Wang Po the chance to unsheathe his blade.

No matter what sort of truth this blade held, he did not wish to see it.

His purpose had always been to kill Wang Po, not to see Wang Po's blade.

When he decided to strike, no one could possibly move faster.

Only if his opponent was also an expert of the Divine Domain, Xu Yourong in her divine form, or Nanke would they be able to compare.

Wang Po was none of these.

Thus, Tie Shu's hands first fell on Wang Po's blade.

At this point, Wang Po's blade was still sheathed.

The snow falling from the sky suddenly froze in place.

A clap of thunder rumbled through the street.

The buildings standing on both sides of the street were instantly rendered into powder.

The countless snowflakes frozen in the sky also transformed into powder.

The dust settled and the clouds scattered. The street was devoid of people, both Wang Po and Tie Shu vanishing without a trace.

Yet the thunder continued, lingering and rumbling without end.

Ultimately, it crashed into the Luo River.

Chapter 706 – The Breaking of Wang Po (I)

This year, the winter in the capital was much colder than it had been in the past. It was still early winter, but the surface of the Luo River had already frozen. It was even worse in the river beyond the canal gates, where the ice was so thick that people could stand on it.

At this time, Wang Po and Tie Shu were standing on the icy surface of the Luo River.

Between the two was a hole ten-some zhang in radius. The waters of the river rippled within, pitch-black like an abyss.

The clap of thunder that had resounded through the capital had risen from the snowy street and ultimately descended into this hole.

Tie Shu, his hands held behind him, expressionlessly gazed across this hole, acting as if he had not struck earlier.

Wang Po held his blade horizontally in front of him. Many holes were ripped in his clothes, especially his robe. His collar and sleeves looked as if they had been blown about in some mighty gale for several decades.

Bloodstains could faintly be seen within those tears on his clothes.

It was obvious that after this single exchange, he had been injured, and his injuries were not light.

But there was no sign of relaxation in Tie Shu's eyes, let alone any disdain or contempt. On the contrary, they became graver and much more vigilant.

Wang Po's blade was held horizontally in front of him, but it still had not been unsheathed. Several clear finger marks could be seen on the sheath, and it was clearly beginning to bend.

He still did not unsheathe the blade.

An expert of the Divine Domain had taken the initiative to strike, yet he still did not unsheathe the blade.

This was a most confusing and shocking matter.

Even more shocking was that although he had suffered significant injuries, he was still alive.

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In Xunyang City, when he was facing Zhu Luo in the rainy street, he had not hesitated to use his strongest blade techniques to cleave countless cracks in space and just barely keep Zhu Luo's moonlight on the other end of the street.

But today in the capital's snowy street, against Tie Shu, he did not even unsheathe his blade, but was able to firmly receive Tie Shu's strike.

Tie Shu, like Zhu Luo, was one of the Eight Storms, and in terms of fighting power, he was even slightly superior to Zhu Luo.

This meant that in the short span of two years, Wang Po's blade had grown much stronger than it had been in Xunyang City.

Tie Shu was expressionless, but his mind was slightly astonished.

Without using his blade, Wang Po had been able to firmly receive Tie Shu's powerful strike and could even still stand. His opponent truly was the supreme expert of the younger generation.

He did not know exactly how much progress Wang Po had made in these past two years, only that he was much stronger than had been rumored, even stronger than what he had perceived at Tanzhe Temple.

This advancement speed was truly too outrageous.

He now found it impossible to judge just how far Wang Po was from that threshold.

And there was still that other consideration:

Wang Po still had not unsheathed his blade.

"What sort of blade is this?" Tie Shu suddenly asked.

Since Wang Po had not unsheathed his blade, what was Tie Shu asking about?

If there had been spectators on the banks of the Luo River, they would certainly be unable to understand this question.

Wang Po understood.

'Blade' was just one word, but it could have many meanings:

The blade itself.

The technique used by the blade.

The trajectory of the blade.

The path of the blade.

He had not unsheathed his blade, but he had already used his technique.

His technique was to hold his blade horizontally in front of him.

Wang Po's Dao of the blade and the wonder of this technique completely rested in holding it horizontally.

Only this way could he block Tie Shu's attack without unsheathing his blade.

Tie Shu had never seen such an exquisite blade technique before.

What he asked was the name and origin of this technique.

"I don't know," Wang Po answered.

"He didn't tell me."

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The distance between the Wei Estate and the alley of the Northern Military Department was somewhat far and required crossing the Luo River.

When Wang Po and Chen Changsheng were coming, they had stopped by the banks of the Luo River to chat.

The banks of the Luo River had winter willows and dikes, while the surface of the river had ice and stories.

In their first meeting at Xunyang City, they did not speak very much. This time, in their reunion within the capital, they knew that they would soon part, perhaps forever, so they chatted about many things.

They chatted about Wang Zhice's deeds in the past, about the present state of the Bridge of Helplessness, and also about each other's pasts.

When he saw the metal blade at Wang Po's waist, Chen Changsheng recalled that mausoleum within the Garden of Zhou as well as that mausoleum's owner. He also thought of the blade style inscribed upon the black coffin and came up with an idea.

He could not orally pass down this blade style, only describe to Wang Po the things he had comprehended from it.

Wang Po did not thank him, nor did he refuse. It was evident, however, that he was not very interested.

Even though he knew that it was the strongest blade style ever developed.

He had his own path of the blade, and his path traveled in a completely different direction from Zhou Dufu's blade.

Chen Changsheng then said that he had learned the sword from Su Li in the wilderness.

Many cultivators of the world were very interested in this matter, or perhaps jealous.

Wang Po was not jealous, as he did not like Su Li. However, it was still Su Li's sword, so he was somewhat interested.

His interest was especially piqued when Chen Changsheng mentioned that the third sword he had learned from Su Li was actually one that not even Su Li had been able to learn.

He said to Chen Changsheng that he wanted to learn this sword.

Chen Changsheng agreed.

Standing under the willows on the banks of the Luo River, they

spoke a few sentences.

Then, Wang Po learned this sword.

In this world, he was the third person to learn this sword.

And he had only needed the time spanning a few sentences to learn it.

If Su Li were to learn of this matter, what would he feel?

This sword was called the Stupid Sword.

Learning this sword required thorough tempering, required constant and monotonous repetition.

This sword did not require talent, but an almost idiotic persistence.

So Su Li was not able to learn this sword, as he was too smart.

Logically speaking, no matter how astonishing Wang Po's talent was, it should have been impossible for him to learn it in such a short amount of time.

Interestingly, the method through which Wang Po practiced his blade was similar to the way in which Chen Changsheng practiced

his sword, just practice.

In these past decades, he had already waved his blade far too many times.

Now, he just needed to treat the sword as a blade to be able to use this sword, this blade.

Thus, Tie Shu's two terrifying hands were unable to break through the blade sheath.

"You lost because you were wrong."

Wang Po looked at Tie Shu and said, "You should not have tried to stop me from unsheathing the blade."

After a moment of silence, Tie Shu asked, "Why?"

Wang Po explained, "Only when a blade is still sheathed can it go through thousands of changes, can it possess limitless possibilities. Although the blade is not at its strongest at that time, it is also at its most unbreakable."

Tie Shu asked, "Then I have to foolishly wait for you to pull out your blade?"

Wang Po replied, "The more you don't dare to see the true appearance of this blade, the more often the true appearance will

be worse than what you desired."

Tie Shu's expression was apathetic, but his hands clenched behind him. Cold light and sharpness began to flow from between his fingers, silently slicing apart the wind and snow.

This sight was a symbol of his current mood. Wang Po had spoken correctly about his intentions, so did that mean that he had predicted the correct conclusion?

Tie Shu fixed his eyes upon Wang Po's blade as he taunted, "Then you can show its true appearance to me—if you can still do it, that is."

Wang Po's blade was the truth.

From the moment he left Scholartree Manor, the entire world had raised its head in anticipation.

But now this blade had been bent, so how could he pull it from its sheath?

As the words fell, Tie Shu had already reached Wang Po, his two hands tearing through the air.

A fierce gale rose over the Luo River, snow blurring and obscuring all. Amongst the gale, ten fingers could barely be seen, shaking the snow and tearing through the sky as they rose. They were the spreading branches of an enormous tree, a massive flower

beginning to bloom.

Countless extremely tough and metallic strands of Qi descended upon Wang Po as the branches spread, as the petals bloomed.

The iron tree bloomed.

This was a Daoist technique of the Divine Domain, a power from above the starry sky.

The blade could defend all it wished, but it would still be unable to obscure all of the starry sky.

If Wang Po still did not unsheathe his blade, he would die without question.

So Wang Po finally unsheathed his blade.

While the blade was still in the sheath, its intent was already rising.

An incredibly swift and forceful, yet also very plain and simple, blade Dao soared to the heavens.

The snowstorm instantly intensified and countless cracks appeared on the iced-over surface of the Luo River.

When he sensed this blade intent, Tie Shu's expression instantly became apprehensive and a killing intent exploded from his eyes.

Only he could see that Wang Po was actually trying to use this blade to break through!

Chapter 707 – The Breaking of Wang Po (II)

From Tianliang to Wenshui, from the south to the land of demons, from Xunyang City to the capital, from Tanzhe Temple to the snowy street, Wang Po had been preparing to unsheathe this blade.

He had accumulated energy for this blade for so many years so he could cleave open a path between the earth and the starry sky, to chop apart that threshold.

Tie Shu could clearly sense that once Wang Po's blade intent had climbed to the peak, it did not come to a halt, but continued to rise, and even began to undergo some unknown transformations.

Wang Po had long since cultivated to the peak of Star Condensation. If he wanted to continue rising, what could it be other than breaking through?

A grim howl resonated along the two banks of the Luo River.

Tie Shu's figure vanished from in front of Wang Po—but he had not truly vanished, as his figure could be seen everywhere between the snowy clouds and icy surface.

The Qi of the world and the principles contained within had been affected by his body. The incorporeal flower giving off a metal luster descended from the heavens and enclosed Wang Po's blade within.

He used the world to bind Wang Po's blade intent.

This flower went into full bloom through the use of his flourishing body and those hands imbued with a cold light!

The iron tree bloomed into thousands of flowers, each flower and each petal symbolizing a law or principle of the world, possessing abnormal strength.

If Wang Po wanted to survive, he needed to either see through these laws or directly break through them.

He had only cultivated for several decades, so how could he see through the technique that Tie Shu had tempered through his endless years?

And no matter how high his blade intent advanced, it could not cleave through Tie Shu's strike imbued with the laws of the world.

So what could he do?

Wang Po's blade intent surged upward.

With a squelch, his left arm was severed and flew into the sky.

A spurt of blood appeared amongst this monotonous world of snow white.

The clouds in the sky and the dancing snow were instantly smeared by this garish red.

The ghastly sight of a sky filled with blood seemed like both flowing lava and rotten plums, wanting to burn everything clean away, to contaminate all things.

Within this blood was an extremely terrifying and awe-inspiring Qi.

From some place in the sky came a furious roar of utter disbelief, Tie Shu's cry.

From the moment Wang Po cut off his own arm, his arm became his blade, his blood became his Dao, and so what blade intent was he using?

How could this blade intent be so powerful and terrifying? Why could it so easily break through the laws of the world?

If the Pope or Shang Xingzhou were present, perhaps they would understand.

This blade intent was called 'The World Ablaze' and it was a part of Zhou Dufu's Halving Blade Style.

At the end of cultivation, different paths often rejoined, but that

had nothing to do with the Halving Blade Style blade intent that Wang Po was using now.

Earlier by the Luo River, Chen Changsheng had spoken of his understanding of the Halving Blade Style for Wang Po to hear, but he had only casually listened and didn't seem to care too much.

But was he really completely indifferent?

Of course not.

Zhou Dufu was publicly acknowledged as the supreme expert under the starry sky, and he used the blade.

Wang Po was publicly acknowledged as the strongest master of the path of the blade since Zhou Dufu, and he obviously also used a blade.

Whether he admitted or denied it, Zhou Dufu's path of the blade had always been influencing his cultivation.

As long as his name existed, as long as the Halving Blade still existed, this influence would always remain.

He was keenly aware that if he used the blade intent of the Halving Blade today, even if he could break through Tie Shu's attack imbued with the laws of the world, his cultivation in the path of the blade would be greatly affected in the future.

But he still swung this blade down.

If he were just inheriting this blade, his strike would still not be enough to cleave through Tie Shu's flower.

But he had first swung this blade down upon himself.

This blade had come from Zhou Dufu, but what it cut at was all the influence Zhou Dufu and other practitioners of the blade had on him.

This he was not inheriting or succeeding to this blade, but accepting it and then giving it up.

No one in the world could do this.

Even Wang Po needed to cut off his own arm.

But as his arm flew into the sky, all the fog in his heart was driven away, and all shadows vanished. Everything before his eyes was bright and clear.

Only then did his blade cleave at Tie Shu's blooming flower.

Thus, blood filled the sky and flowers fell like mud.

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Wang Po's Dao heart had reached an unprecedented level of calm, but the blood that sprayed in all directions was blazing hot, melting away the snow in the air and the ice on the river.

His blade infused with his blood had broken through those petals representing the laws of the world and reached Tie Shu.

The blade was still sheathed, but its intent had already pierced through the world.

Those terrifying and destructive auras, those cold and resolute Qis, had all disappeared. Only he remained.

An unmovable snowy mountain, an unshakable pine tree..

If his blade were now unsheathed, perhaps he really could defeat Tie Shu.

Fortunately, his blade still could not leave its sheath.

Tie Shu knew that this was an opportunity he should seize.

In today's battle on the Luo River, Wang Po had displayed a talent and resolve that far exceeded his imagination and shocked him to his core.

But since Wang Po could defy all logic to suddenly break through that threshold, Tie Shu still firmly believed that he would easily grasp victory.

Because he had long seen Wang Po's problem.

Wang Po had been saving this blade for too long.

When one had spent enough time and accumulated enough power, new problems would often occur that one had never imagined.

For example, Wang Po's blade was still in its sheath, and his sheath was even bent.

If he wanted to unsheathe the blade, it would be somewhat more troublesome and slower than it was before.

Even if it was just the instant that it took for a lightning bolt to descend, it was enough time to change this battle.

With a cold howl, Tie Shu's body appeared above the Luo River in the center of the thousands of flowers, his palm crashing towards Wang Po's head.

Just as he had done in the beginning.

Wang Po seemed as if he did not know that his blade was still in its sheath. He continued his action of brandishing his blade, his expression serene and even somewhat wooden.

Suddenly, an extremely faint sound resonated through the world.

It was a very light crack.

It was like the sound of a yellow leaf in Tanzhe Temple being blown by the wind, the sound of someone stepping on the snow of a long street.

No, it was like something had broken.

It was the layer of ice thinned by heat, the winter willows on the banks cut apart by the ripples of power!

It was a silver vase bursting, the arrival of a great army!

It was the ice breaking and spring flourishing across the mountains!

It was the breaking of breaking through.

It was the breaking (破) of Wang Po (王破).

Wang Po had broken through!

His blade broke through its sheath and cleaved at Tie Shu!

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This was naturally the most powerful blade Wang Po had struck with in his entire life.

The heavens and earth had to give some reaction to show their respect.

The snow falling from the clouds suddenly stopped.

Countless cracks appeared on the layer of ice of the Luo River, transforming into several thousand thick and heavy ice floes.

Those ice floes constantly bobbed up and down as if some giant monster was violently thrashing about below.

In truth, the waters of the river had been disturbed by the Qi of

the heavens and earth and surged about.

After some time, all returned to stillness.

Wang Po gripped his blade and gazed ten-some li away.

His severed arm had flown off to parts unknown. He was covered in blood, his face pale, yet his eyes extremely calm.

Ten-some li away, Tie Shu stood on the ice. It seemed like he wanted to say something, but he ultimately just shook his head.

He fell backwards into the river littered with chunks of ice and willow branches, and died.

The flower descends, and the blade rises...perhaps if Tie Shu wanted to win, this should have been the other way around?

Chapter 708 – Forward, Forward

Chunks of ice floated about the river. Tie Shu floated amongst them with his eyes open, already dead.

His eyes reflected the gloomy sky, just like the surface of the water and the chunks of ice around him.

An extremely straight wound was visible on his abdomen. It was extremely deep, cutting straight through his Ethereal Palace and all his Qi openings, severing any chance of survival.

From this wound, one could see the strike of Wang Po's blade.

His blade was still as it used to be, but it had also undergone many subtle transformations, and also seemed to have reached a more profound level of cultivation.

When his blade broke through his sheath, he successfully broke through into the next realm.

As a prerequisite, he needed to expel the shadow that Zhou Dufu had cast upon his soul.

Before a lofty peak, some people would choose to walk around, others would choose to retreat, and others would choose to climb.

Wang Po had always walked forward towards this high

mountain. The peak had always been close to his eyes, yet he had never been able to get any closer.

It was only at that moment, when he destroyed his internal demon, that he finally established his own path of the blade.

For Tie Shu to die in this battle in which Wang Po established his path was no disgrace.

However, Wang Po had just broken through and he had not accumulated enough energy. In order to slay an expert of the Divine Domain, he had to pay an enormous price.

He had severed one of his arms, and now, injuries that were even more terrifying than this severed arm were beginning to encroach upon his meridians and his will.

The cold winds of winter blew past the willows on the banks of the Luo River, lightly swaying the chunks of ice on the water and everything within them.

The wind, although cold, was not very fierce. However, the body of Tie Shu amongst the chunks of ice melted into smoke in the wind, vanishing from the world.

Immediately afterwards, the wind blew against Wang Po's clothes, widening the tears upon it. Blood instantly exploded from his body in a cascade.

Countless indistinct strands of Qi accompanied this blood in departing from his body.

Wang Po's face was bloodless, whiter even than the snow that covered the dikes of the river.

His body became extremely heavy and devoid of strength.

He walked towards the shore.

The icy waters of the river seemed to have become much stickier, and his walk very arduous.

A straight line of blood appeared in the river, then began to diffuse to the two banks. The edges of this line were frozen, becoming things akin to blood-colored pieces of coral.

He didn't know where he should go, but seeing that the eastern bank of the Luo River was in front of him, he walked over there.

He was used to walking forward.

But he seemed to have chosen wrongly.

Many figures appeared amongst the wind-blown willows lining the river.

The first to arrive on the banks of the Luo River was the Tang Second Master. Behind him were several hundred cavalry from the Imperial Guard and two Divine Generals of the Great Zhou.

His face was littered with very fine wounds, making him look very battered.

These were wounds inflicted by Wang Po and Tie Shu's first clash on the snowy street.

As he stared at Wang Po, the shock and fury in his eyes gradually vanished, supplanted by a cold indifference.

Then, he gave a noiseless laugh, his smile containing an indescribable ridicule, contempt, and pity.

Yes, you've successfully broken through, becoming an expert of the Divine Domain revered by all the people of the world.

But now, you will die.

Just how despairing of a fact was this, how worthy of celebrating a story?

The Tang Second Master withdrew his smile and raised his right hand. With an apathetic expression, he waved.

Several hundred sharp arrows carrying a dazzling light flew up

from the shore of the Luo River and descended towards the center.

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All was quiet in the Li Palace, the atmosphere abnormally tense. The snow on the eaves silently melted, but before it could fall, it froze into beads of ice.

Time slowly passed, but no one appeared.

Madam Mu gazed at the snowy clouds in the sky, her brows slightly raised in surprise.

Who had been able to make Shang Xingzhou remain in the Imperial Palace?

And who had created such turmoil on the streets of the capital?

Tie Shu? No, if it were just him alone, this thunder would not be so resounding.

This thunder finally fell upon the Luo River.

The laws of the world above the Luo River began to change.

An incorporeal flower descended upon the world.

The intent of a metal blade soared upwards to meet it.

Madam Mu was finally moved.

Wang Po had broken through!

Tie Shu had died!

This shocked her, made her fall silent, and then she regained her stern composure.

The words Zhu Luo had said right before his death at the Mausoleum of Books had not merely been for Shang Xingzhou's ear. They had also been for her and her husband.

At any other time, she would have personally taken action and killed Wang Po.

But right now, she needed to remain in the Li Palace to herd the snow clouds in the sky, temporarily opposing the Orthodoxy's will and making it impossible for them to leave.

Fortunately, she could clearly sense that Wang Po had no more strength to fight after defeating Tie Shu.

In the capital, if he was unable to fight, he could only die.

If he died, how could Chen Changsheng survive?

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All around him were assassins, killers and experts of profound cultivation.

Xiao De stood before him.

Chen Changsheng was not surprised at his present circumstances.

He knew that his master wanted to kill him, had always wanted to kill him.

It was related to the position of Pope, but there was an even more important reason: he was too close to his senior brother.

That no one else had brought up this point did not mean that he himself was unaware of it.

He had always believed that his master would show his hand on the day when his martial uncle the Pope returned to the sea of

stars.

Consequently, before that day came, he had to finish those tasks.

When the sky was filled with yellowed leaves, he had gone to New North Bridge and exhausted all his energies to prepare for the little Black Dragon's escape in two years.

When the sky was filled with wind and snow, he had come to the alley of the Northern Military Department to kill Zhou Tong.

He had not expected that his master so urgently wanted him to die.

Perhaps it was today.

Yes, there was still no noise from the long street.

So it must be today.

One final leaf still remained on the bare branches of the crabapple tree. When that assassin struck the wall, that leaf also fell. It noiselessly descended to the snowy earth, falling in front of Chen Changsheng's shoes.

Chen Changsheng's gaze moved upward, eventually falling upon Xiao De's face.

This leading expert of the younger generation of demi-humans had appeared today at the alley of the Northern Military Department naturally due to White Emperor City's will. At the very least, he had obtained the silent permission of that pair of Saints.

In these past two years, many gifts, greetings, and honors had been conferred upon the Orthodox Academy by White Emperor City, but now it seemed as if none of it had had any meaning. He did not ask for any reasons or justifications, as the reason for everything in the world often boiled down to the words 'benefit' and 'interest'. The White Emperor couple had to consider the interest of the demi-humans in their plans, and the good impressions they once had for Chen Changsheng would not affect their cold determinations. Xiao De had to think about his own interests, and he had no good impressions of Chen Changsheng. For the eight hundred li of the Red River and Luoluo, he was very willing to see Chen Changsheng die.

"I must request that you die."

Xiao De said gravely to him, then sent a fist smashing forward.

It was a simple fist, but it was monstrously terrifying. The forceful true essence of the demi-humans stimulated the Qi of the world and immediately flew before his eyes.

At the same time, the swords of ten-some Star Condensation assassins stabbed through the snow, cutting off all paths of retreat.

If Chen Changsheng were to force a retreat, he would have to face these frightening swords and still have to deal with Xiao De's even more terrifying fist.

If he chose to go forward, he would be stopped by Xiao De's fist, and those ten-some swords behind would explode with a most terrifying power.

Right now, it seemed like he would die no matter what he chose.

Perhaps for this reason, he chose to go forward.

If death was both forward and behind, why not go forward? Of course he had to go forward.

He rammed through the wind and snow, his sword stabbing forward.

He moved even faster than Xiao De's fist.

His sword intent was just like a wildfire.

No, it was more like Heavenly Fire.

Fire that fell from the heavens was lightning.

His sword stabbed like lightning towards Xiao De's body.

Simultaneously, Xiao De's fist also reached his body.

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Chapter 709 – Always Forward, No Matter Where You Go

Only ten-some zhang separated the street from the wall of the courtyard.

But to cross this distance was a most arduous feat.

If it was difficult to cross, one should go around.

A straight line of fire suddenly appeared, its fierce flames melting the snow into mist and then smoke.

At the very front of this streak of fire was Chen Changsheng. To be more precise, the streak of fire originated from the sword in his hands.

This was the second sword that Su Li had taught him: the Blazing Sword.

Xiao De had an extremely high level of cultivation, and he had a rich store of experience, but even he had been caught somewhat unprepared by Chen Changsheng's sword.

This sword used the sword intent of the Mount Li Sword Style's final move, one of absolute resolution, of utter disdain for one's own life.

Xiao De was surprised that Chen Changsheng's first move was this powerful sword that injured both sides.

This was something that Chen Changsheng had already prepared himself to do.

He currently had abundant stores of true essence and a stable spiritual sense, but there was still a vast distance between him and the true experts atop the Proclamation of Liberation.

He knew that if he wanted to defeat such experts, he needed to catch them off guard, to use the abilities that no one knew about to their maximum. This was because once those abilities and strategies that no one knew about were used, they would lose their effectiveness against these experts.

This meant that he could use each strategy only once.

In the Orthodox Academy, he had used the black stone and the thousands of swords to defeat Eunuch Lin, but now he could not use them to defeat comparable experts.

He knew that if he wanted to kill Zhou Tong, he would have to confront many true experts, so in the past few days, he had made many deductions, designed many contingency plans, simulating matches with Xiao De, Xiao Zhang, Zhou Tong, the Prince of Zhongshan, the Prince of Xiang...

He had even once considered how he might have a sliver of a

chance if he faced off against Wang Po.

A person who loved to read, loved to think, loved to make notes, loved to solve problems, would always be much more prepared than his opponents and would often obtain inconceivable victories.

Wang Zhice had only begun to cultivate in his middle age, so why had he rarely suffered defeat after stepping onto the stage of history?

Why was it that when Gou Hanshi was only at Ethereal Opening, everyone believed that he would succeed in entering the Star Condensation Realm?

Chen Changsheng was also this sort of person.

So he had also succeeded.

The success spoken of here did not mean that he had defeated Xiao De. Instead, it meant that he had successfully integrated this battle into his deductions.

As the supreme expert of the demi-humans' younger generation, Xiao De had an extremely fast response time, and his assessment of the situation at the time had been incredibly accurate.

When Chen Changsheng's sword with its resolute intent struck at his body, Xiao De's left hand was flying through the snowy air, clawing down at Chen Changsheng.

Xiao De's body was harder than iron or rock. Regular weapons and attacks from cultivators at the middle level of Star Condensation and below simply could not harm him.

But he did not know that Chen Changsheng's sword was much sharper than described on the Tier of Legendary Weapons, and Chen Changsheng's understanding of the sword and quantity of true essence far surpassed that of an ordinary lower level Star Condensation cultivator.

With a swish, the dagger stabbed into Xiao De's palm like a piece of cardboard cutting into a cake of dirt, but failed to enter any further.

A roar of berserk fury burst from his lips.

Even now, he still believed that his response was correct.

Although Chen Changsheng's sword might pierce through his hand and into his chest, Chen Changsheng himself would also be unable to leave, at least not at that moment.

When Xiao De's fist fell, it was certain to render Chen Changsheng's face into pulp.

Chen Changsheng truly could not avoid this fist, much less leave, even if he cast away his dagger, even if he used the Yeshi Step.

He was moving too fast, with all his energy put into it. Since he had resolved himself to moving forward, how could he retreat? It seemed like he was sending himself towards Xiao De's fist.

Yet Xiao De's fist was unable to fall on Chen Changsheng's face.

A somewhat shabby paper umbrella unfurled from Chen Changsheng's left hand. The umbrella unfurled at the speed of an actual lightning bolt, shielding his body.

Xiao De's fist fell on the umbrella's canopy.

There was an enormous thud!

The canopy of the umbrella practically caved in, but it did not tear.

An unimaginably majestic energy transferred from Xiao De's fist into the umbrella and into Chen Changsheng's body.

This surging power could not be manipulated in any way. It was a complete expression of Xiao De's strength. Chen Changsheng was unable to endure it, and retreated one step.

With a crack, the ice under his feet shattered, as did the street beneath the ice.

A mouthful of blood bubbled up from his throat. It tasted rather

sweet.

It turned out that one step wasn't enough.

He retreated another step.

Still not enough.

The strength transmitted through the Yellow Paper Umbrella was this terrifying, this overbearing.

He continued to retreat, his shoes leaving the ground like rocks hurtling through the air.

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Xiao De's fist seemed simple, but contained an entire life's worth of bitter tempering.

The full-strength blow of an expert of the Proclamation of Liberation was truly terrifying.

Chen Changsheng was sent flying, his speed no slower than when he had used his Blazing Sword to charge forward.

Fortunately, he flew so fast that he was able to narrowly avoid those forceful strands of sword intent behind him.

He at least avoided any critical damage, the sword intents leaving only a few tears on his clothes.

He fell on the snow at the other end of the street.

His body swayed as if he would collapse at any moment.

He had walked forward with resolve, his first exchange had been a surprise attack with the Blazing Sword, yet he had been unable to win. He had been forced back one step, two steps, then finally several dozen steps.

Anyone could see that he had suffered a critical setback.

But Chen Changsheng did not think so.

Xiao De also did not believe so, as he had the vague impression that Chen Changsheng had done this intentionally.

His avoiding the assault of the ten-some sword intents had not been a fluke, but a result calculated ahead of time.

This sort of feeling made Xiao De very unhappy.

And when he felt that deep pain on his abdomen, this feeling of unhappiness deepened.

With an angry howl, he lunged through the snow onto the street.

But he lunged at nothing.

A blazing light burst from the Stainless Sword, an explosive sword intent that pierced through the entire street.

Chen Changsheng used the Blazing Sword again, at the same time using the Yeshi Step.

This time, he did not attempt to bravely advance forward again, but flew forward through the snow at an angle.

He was like a puff of smoke, a thunderbolt.

There was also a wall there, but this wall did not conceal the bare branches of the crabapple tree and that courtyard beyond it. In fact, no one knew what was behind this wall.

Chen Changsheng rammed through the wall.

This was followed immediately after by the sounds of wall after wall being rammed through, constantly booming through the street.

There were many courtyards and houses on this street, none of them where he wanted to go.

But these buildings were all connected through walls, so if he kept ramming through the walls, he would eventually charge into the place he wanted to go.

The courtyard of the crabapple tree.

And he always knew where this particular courtyard was, so his direction never once erred.

Retreating or going around sometimes did not mean that one had given up, but that one had chosen a different method of moving forward.

That was what Chen Changsheng thought, so that was what he did.

The starry sky would always take pity on those prepared and courageous youths.

He succeeded once more.

The crabapple tree was reflected in his eyes, followed soon after by the silhouette of a sword.

Starlight glimmered within the sleeves of this assassin. It was yet

another Star Condensation assassin, probably also from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets.

Yet in front of the sinister and frightening attack, Chen Changsheng did not stop or even slow his speed.

With a buzz, the Yellow Paper Umbrella unfurled once more, blocking the snow falling from the crabapple tree and also blocking that sword.

A small amount of sword intent broke past the brim of the umbrella and ripped at the clothes on his shoulder.

A sword glow shone from his hand and, obscured by the Yellow Paper Umbrella, cut a deep wound in the assassin's throat.

Grasping his throat, the assassin from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets collapsed.

This assassin had perhaps killed many famous people, and if people were to know of his true identity, they would be stunned.

Yet Chen Changsheng did not even glance at him as he continued charging forward.

It wasn't because he was very familiar with the most outstanding and third most outstanding assassins in the world.

It was because what he needed the most right now was time.

Xiao De would probably catch up very quickly.

Xiao Zhang might appear at any moment.

Those experts might surround the courtyard again at any moment.

Crucially, how long would Wang Po be able to delay Tie Shu on the street?

He did not know.

The crabapple tree swayed. There were no leaves to shed, so only one or two severed branches fell.

In the alley outside the courtyard, Xiao De gave a long and enraged howl.

Several dozen powerful Qis were currently approaching from every direction.

Chen Changsheng was already at the stone steps.

At the top of them was a palace armchair.

On the chair sat a man.

This man wore a deep red official's gown.

He seemed to be seated in a sea of blood.

It was precisely Zhou Tong.

Chapter 710 – Two Kites (I)

Just when Chen Changsheng saw Zhou Tong, a clap of thunder boomed out from the street behind him and crashed somewhere very far away.

He sensed the battle taking place on the Luo River, felt the laws of the world changing, and also felt a blade intent that he was very closely connected with.

Immediately afterwards, this blade intent was broken, and a whole new blade intent took its place.

He was shocked, and then inspired, and also had a clearer understanding of the present situation.

Killing Zhou Tong was the task that he and Wang Po had set out to do. Now, Wang Po had removed the greatest obstacle of this task, Tie Shu. The rest was up to him.

A blurred figure suddenly shattered the wind and snow in the courtyard.

Chen Changsheng borrowed the power of the snowstorm to reach the palace armchair, the dagger in his hands stabbing at the seated Zhou Tong.

His sword intent summoned a wave of heat and light.

This heat and light came from his fiercely blazing true essence.

The cold wind ruffled Zhou Tong's official's gown and massive waves rose from the sea of blood.

The Stainless Sword plunged into the waves, striking straight into the depths of the sea of blood.

This was not Chen Changsheng's first visit to this courtyard, nor was it his first attempt to kill Zhou Tong.

With experience came caution, so he had made many preparations for this moment.

His attack seemed simple, but many backup plans were waiting behind it.

This attack was the Intellectual Sword, its true form being the vanguard of countless more sword techniques.

The True Sword of the Orthodoxy, the Toppling Mountain Staff, Gathering Evening Clouds of the Three Forms of Wenshui, the Cold Branch Intent of the temple sword—all of it was contained within this single strike.

And behind this strike, he had prepared three more supreme techniques that no one knew about.

No matter how Zhou Tong responded, it would all be swallowed up by the furious waves of an unending river of sword techniques.

Perhaps he would be killed by this one strike.

Yet what happened next somewhat exceeded his imagination.

Zhou Tong had not suddenly broken through, becoming a supreme expert of the Divine Domain.

Nor had Chen Changsheng's teacher suddenly appeared.

Rather, Zhou Tong's response was somewhat strange.

Zhou Tong's response was to do nothing.

He did nothing at all.

With a squelch, the incomparably sharp dagger easily pierced through the official's robe, stabbing into Zhou Tong's stomach as if it were rotten pulp.

Perhaps because the official's robe was already as red as blood, it was very difficult to see if Zhou Tong was bleeding or not.

Zhou Tong's face was pale, his eyes utterly cold. A sharp sword had been run through his body, yet he showed not a hint of pain.

He gazed at Chen Changsheng, his eyes filling with ridicule as if he was gazing at a corpse that was once a most oafish buffoon.

Zhou Tong was a sinister minister empowered with great authority, and also an upper level Star Condensation expert.

The news that Chen Changsheng and Wang Po wanted to kill him had long since spread to the entire capital, so it was impossible for him to have not made preparations.

No matter how abundant Chen Changsheng's own preparations, it was impossible for it to be so easy to kill Zhou Tong.

The moment the dagger stabbed through the great crimson official's gown, Chen Changsheng knew that there was something wrong.

Perhaps there was something wrong with the entire matter, or perhaps there was something wrong with Zhou Tong himself.

Then, Zhou Tong's body vanished right before his eyes.

The crimson official's gown fell on the palace armchair.

An extremely thick scent of blood flowed down the stone steps like blood, spreading until it completely enclosed the entire courtyard.

The Zhou Tong that had been sitting in the palace armchair this entire time had not actually been real. It had just been his gown.

How had he done this? How had he been able to conceal it from his subordinates? And most incomprehensible of all, how had he been able to conceal it from Chen Changsheng's eyes?

Chen Changsheng was born in the Sacred Light, was bathed in dragon blood, had his organs washed by the Tianhai Divine Empress. His eyes were extraordinarily bright, and both arrays and disguises were easily seen through by his eyes.

Then there was only one probability. What had been fooled was not his eyes, but his mind.

Many people knew that Zhou Tong had an extremely profound and horrifying mental technique called the Great Crimson Gown.

Perhaps that was the reason?

Chen Changsheng naturally knew that Zhou Tong's mental technique was powerful. In this place, he had once fought against the Great Crimson Gown, and he had already experienced it twice.

But he truly had not expected Zhou Tong's Great Crimson Gown to be this powerful, far exceeding the two times he had experienced it before.

He did not know that the two times he had been able to come out unharmed against Zhou Tong's Great Crimson Gown were because the Tianhai Divine Empress had rubbed a drop of clear tea on his forehead.

But now she was gone; the tea had gone cold.

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Zhou Tong was not there.

Naturally, then, Chen Changsheng's sword had missed.

All his preparations, all the sword techniques concealed behind him, all his strategies, had missed the mark.

Most importantly, his mind, will, and resolve had all completely missed.

With a howl of cold wind, the crabapple tree shook, and Xiao De tore through the air, his fist flying.

Chen Changsheng had thrust his sword with all he had, so it was naturally not possible for him to return it very quickly.

The gale stirred by the fist caused his clothes to dance, making his movements seem very slow.

But this sort of slow speed had a very stable tempo.

He turned his wrist and lightly shook his hand. The Yellow Paper Umbrella in his left hand unfurled itself on his shoulder.

This set of actions was very clean and efficient.

Xiao De's fist once more smashed against the Yellow Paper Umbrella, its boundless might falling against it.

Like a loose kite, Chen Changsheng was tossed into the air, falling into the hall that had just been rebuilt a few weeks ago.

With a heavy thud, his body smashed through several hardy stone walls and then crashed to the floor.

Dust plumed and buildings slowly collapsed.

He stood up from the debris-littered floor.

The blood-covered Xiao De seemed like a real monster as he came from behind.

Expert after expert tore through the air, appearing on walls and

trees as they surrounded the courtyard.

Even the weakest of these experts had reached the Star Condensation Realm.

They came from the various ministries of the Imperial Court, the army, the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets, and some of them belonged to this place, assassins of the Department for Purging Officials.

Zhou Tong was not there.

He had used his Great Crimson Gown technique to create a massive deception.

Today was clearly a trap.

Chen Changsheng had stepped into this trap.

Before this reality, many people would be deeply perplexed, their minds confused.

Even if they weren't perplexed or confused, they would still feel a sense of defeat.

Even if one's will was extraordinarily resolute, falling into an opponent's trap would cause one to be somewhat wary.

Even if one's Dao heart was brightly lit and could completely drive these negative emotions away, one would at least feel regretful, and would at least want to know the whereabouts of Zhou Tong, since he wasn't here.

Chen Changsheng did not feel any of these things.

He put away the Yellow Paper Umbrella, placed the hilt of his dagger in his sheath, and then turned to face Xiao De and those experts that surrounded him.

His actions were not panicked or confused, and his expression was very calm. His face did not contain any hint of defeat, nor did it show any wariness for the traps and schemes of his enemy.

He had certainly not imagined that the Zhou Tong within the courtyard was fake, or else he would not have used such a thunderous strike.

Why now was he so unperturbed as if he had already predicted all this?

Xiao De found it impossible to understand his composure and grew wary. "You guessed it?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "I had thought of this possibility, but it's not easy to get into this place. If I wanted to kill my way in, I couldn't think about that possibility, so I stopped thinking about it."

This was a rather winding explanation, but Xiao De understood.

If Chen Changsheng really did think that Zhou Tong was not here, even if just an outside chance, he would not have been able to press forward so courageously.

And if he were unable to press forward, he would have never been able to reach this courtyard and stab his sword at the Great Crimson Gown sitting on the palace armchair.

Xiao De asked, "Then how can you still be so calm?"

Chen Changsheng explained, "I've already done my best and there's nothing to be ashamed about, so naturally, I'm calm."

Xiao De mocked, "It's still that tired phrase."

"I wasn't speaking of my heart, I was saying that I already accomplished my objective."

After saying this, Chen Changsheng gave a few painful coughs.

Even with the protection of the Yellow Paper Umbrella, a few of his bones had been broken by Xiao De's two fists.

There was no blood visible because he had grown accustomed to hiding such things in his battles. In reality, however, the true

essence in his meridians was already beginning to slow.

Xiao De slowly narrowed his eyes and said, "You don't even know where Zhou Tong is, and you dare say that you've accomplished your objective?"

"No one knows where a loose kite will land, but he's no kite. He's just a dog that's been frightened away from here by me.

"And just how long can a stray dog live?" Chen Changsheng asked.

Chapter 711 – Two Kites (II)

Anyone could see that Chen Changsheng was just forcing an argument, forcing a smile, forcing his composure. Xiao De also thought this, so the scorn on his face grew stronger and stronger.

Chen Changsheng explained, "It would naturally be best if I could kill him, but even if I can't, it's not bad if I can drive him out of this place."

Xiao De did not understand his reasoning, nor did the dozens of experts present.

Even if it was as Chen Changsheng had said, that the trap that Zhou Tong had laid had made him a stray dog, why was a stray dog so close to death?

In the peak of summer or the depths of winter, stray dogs could be seen around any part of the capital. Although they lived rather bitter lives, it was not so easy for them to die. And if Zhou Tong was a dog, he was no ordinary dog. He had the sharpest teeth in the world, and they were also coated in the most frightening of poisons.

But it was precisely because Zhou Tong was a stray dog that Chen Changsheng believed that his death was close.

A stray dog would live in a constant state of anxiety. After all, a loathsome pest crossing the street was sure to stir the entire street into calling for its head.

Xiao De understood and then looked upon Chen Changsheng like he was a child. "Do you really think somebody will actually help the two of you kill Zhou Tong?"

In his view and in many others', Wang Po and Chen Changsheng's insistence on killing Zhou Tong was the most insane matter in the world. Could there be any more such madmen in the world?

Chen Changsheng very earnestly replied, "I don't know who will come to help us kill Zhou Tong."

Then he added, "But I have faith that there will be someone."

Far too many people wanted Zhou Tong dead.

Once Zhou Tong left this crabapple tree courtyard, left the alley of the Northern Military Department, there was no place in the vastness of the world that could hide him.

Those people who wanted him dead would assuredly take this chance and deliver unto him a most fatal strike.

Shang Xingzhou's existence meant that the vast majority of people who wished for Zhou Tong's death would not move, but some people would.

And the so-called 'vast majority' would not extend to Zhou Tong a helping hand. They would coldly watch from the sides as Zhou Tong died.

It was just like what Su Li experienced on his journey back south, what he experienced in Xunyang City.

But Xiao De did not believe in this conclusion. He said with pity, "When a person is about to die, their mind becomes disordered. What meaning is there in saying any more such words?"

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Against Xiao De, an expert of the Proclamation of Liberation, and several dozen Star Condensation experts, Chen Changsheng seemed to only have death in his future. Wang Po's situation was even more disastrous. Although he had just broken through, his severed arm and heavy injuries had dealt grievous damage to his meridians. Let alone fighting another battle, even walking through the icy river was an incredibly difficult task. Moreover, he was facing several hundred elite cavalry, two Divine Generals, the Tang Second Master, and a torrential rain of crossbow bolts covering the sky.

The sky was torn into shreds by the rain of arrows and the cold wind blew madly about. Wang Po stood in the river, his expression still as calm as ever, even somewhat wooden.

When the entire world wanted to kill him, he carried his blade into the capital. On the snowy street, he battled against the Divine, stunning the world by breaking through in the Luo River via severing his arm. Then, with one blade, he killed the supreme expert that was Tie Shu. In every aspect, he had carried it out to the peak. In wielding his blade, he had also reached the peak of the path of the blade.

There was nothing more to regret, and he had no ability to perform any more world-shocking feats.

He opened his eyes to calmly gaze at the crossbow bolts pouring down from the sky because there was nothing else he could do.

Suddenly, a frenzied gale of snow ripped across the Luo River.

This gale was so fierce that the extremely fast crossbow bolts were all thrown into disarray, deprived of all their strength, then dropped from the sky.

Several hundred arrows fell into the cold waters of the river. They dismally bobbed up and down like so many severed tree branches.

The Tang Second Master suddenly raised his eyes to the snowy sky, his expression shifting, a harshness flashing across his eyes.

Wang Po had to die.

This was the promise made to Zhu Luo by Shang Xingzhou, the White Emperor, and fourteen rebellious princes.

This was obviously the best chance the Imperial Court had to kill Wang Po, and was highly likely to be the last chance.

When that frenzied gale rolled up the rain of arrows, those two Divine Generals began to move.

These two Divine Generals were not ranked the highest in the Great Zhou Army, but they had profound cultivations far surpassing Xue He's. They had reached the upper level of Star Condensation many years ago.

The ten-some winter willows on the river dike were instantly smashed into splinters, two dragonblooded horses neighed as they were jolted to death, and the two Divine Generals lunged towards the Luo River.

Two spears glimmering with cold light pierced at Wang Po!

Whoosh! An extremely clear sound rang out from the snowy sky.

It was like the ice in the Luo River had been completely melted and thrown up high, then fell back down like a waterfall.

No, it was the sound of a kite high up in the sky being blown about by the frigid wind.

A line was tied to the kite, the other end tied to a person.

This person leaped from the sky with a whoosh.

This was the sound of the cold wind blowing against the white paper on this person's face.

He dropped like a stone into the Luo River, appearing in front of those two Divine Generals.

Those two mighty spears arrived.

This person raised his own weapon, also a spear.

This spear was naturally inferior to the Frost God Spear held in the Imperial Palace, and it couldn't compare to a spear in Divine General Han Qing's hands, or even a spear held by Xue Xingchuan.

But this spear was similarly one of the most famous spears in the world. From a certain perspective, it was even more famous than Han Qing's or Xue Xingchuan's spears.

Because its wielder was far too famous.

Now, Han Qing had returned to the demon realm, and Xue Xingchuan was buried in the suburbs of the capital, so what other spear could be as tyrannical as this person's spear, as unbridled?

The spear fiercely stabbed out to block the spears of the two Divine Generals.

Two extremely heavy thumps resounded over the Luo River, and water rippled out from the epicenter.

The Imperial Guards who had already been pushed into the river were now sent to and fro by the aftershocks while the warhorses amongst the willows neighed in pain.

The two Divine Generals were sent crashing back to the shore, coughing blood, their injuries significant.

That person was still standing in the Luo River, not having retreated even half a step.

Another rain of arrows descended from the sky, a torrential rain, a dark cloud. The Luo River instantly dimmed.

The person held his spear horizontally over the cold waters, an unmovable rope of iron.

The power of the spear caused a wall of water a hundred zhang wide to surge out of the Luo River.

The arrows struck the wall and were instantly destroyed.

Immediately, he drew back his spear and brought it back down.

The end of the spear fell within the water and the river became a waterfall in reverse, a gushing spring. Water shot in all directions, aimed at those experts from the army.

Groans could be heard all around the Luo River and the chunks of ice in the river were stained with blood.

In an instant, ten-some experts from the army were heavily injured and lost all ability to fight.

The world gained a moment of peace.

Whoosh.

The kite flew high in the sky.

The wall of water fell back in the river.

The white paper on that person's face constantly trembled.

A spurt of blood shot out of his mouth and dyed the white paper with a garish flower.

Only in the final moment had he finally decided to strike, so he had been rather rushed. Moreover, his opponents were not

ordinary people, but the Imperial Court.

He had used one spear to force back two Divine Generals, one spear to block a rain of arrows, one spear to heavily injure ten-some experts of the army. Even someone like him had to pay a heavy price.

But he did not care, because right now, he could already see that his choice was correct, because right now, he felt very refreshed.

A somewhat hoarse voice brimming with ruthlessness penetrated through the blood-dyed paper and fell in the ears of the countless people on the two banks of the Luo River.

"Who else?"

These were words of unbridled arrogance.

This person had lived his whole life with unbridled arrogance.

A fine Xiao Zhang.

Chapter 712 – A New Chapter for the South

The river was filled with ice floes and flowed slowly, so the brightly-colored blood was not swiftly washed away.

The splatters of blood on the white paper paired with those black holes made Xiao Zhang even more frightening than before.

As they stared at the man in the river, the Imperial Guards felt a fear that they had never felt before. The two Divine Generals stared at the bent spears in their hands, a hint of astonishment flashing through their eyes. They had known that this man was strong, but not to this level.

"Damn it, have you gone crazy!" The Tang Second Master stood on the dike and shrilly shouted at the man standing in the river.

His face was exceptionally gloomy, his eyes burning with a raging fire. He was both incredibly shocked and apoplectic.

Wang Po had severed his arm to break through and then used one blade to kill Tie Shu; this was a fact that he could not accept.

But he found it even more unacceptable that just as Wang Po was about to die, he was saved.

There was simply no reason for this person to save Wang Po.

Painted Armor Xiao Zhang, second on the Proclamation of Liberation, was only beneath Wang Po.

In the eyes of many, he was also the second strongest expert of the middle generation, but still beneath only Wang Po.

In the past few decades, this crazy and violent genius was undefeated in fights amongst his peers. Only against Wang Po was he winless.

Of course, he was the person that most wanted to defeat Wang Po, and after the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, everyone knew that he stood on the side of the Imperial Court. He had every reason to want Wang Po dead, and there was no reason that could explain why he would take such enormous risk to save Wang Po.

A cold wind howled across the river, ruffling the paper on Xiao Zhang's face and causing a few drops of blood to fall.

In the black holes on the paper, one could faintly see Xiao Zhang roll his eyes.

This was naturally aimed at the Tang Second Master's shocked and angry question.

Are you crazy?

Your daddy has always been crazy; do you still need to ask?

Of course, anyone could tell that the Tang Second Master had asked this question so he could hear Xiao Zhang's reason.

Xiao Zhang did not care, regarding him with contempt. He thought, you don't even understand this, so what right do you have to talk with me?

If it were Xun Mei, Xiao De, or even Liang Wangsun that was here, none of them would ask such a question, because they understood.

Wang Po also understood, but the Tang Second Master did not. Wang Po had earlier said that he was far inferior to Xiao Zhang and the others precisely because of this. Even if the Tang Second Master was an outstanding schemer who would one day become a formidable character capable of influencing the entire continent, on the path of warriors, he would never be able to catch up to their group, because he just did not understand.

Xiao Zhang had never liked Wang Po so he wanted to defeat Wang Po, and he also wanted Wang Po to die. However, all this was based on a single premise:

He had to personally do it. No proxies were allowed.

For decades, he had never been a match for Wang Po. Today, Wang Po had slain the Divine with a single blade, casting him even further behind.

It was precisely for this reason that he could not allow Wang Po to die. Otherwise, he would never get a chance to defeat Wang Po for the rest of his life.

Even if he also entered the Divine Domain and even cultivated beyond that, he would forever be inferior.

Xun Mei had chosen to abandon his old desires and brave death to step upon the Divine Path on that night, and now Xiao Zhang had gone against his will and put his life on the line to save Wang Po, both for the same reason.

"Get going."

More and more people were gathering on the banks of the river. Seeing those soldiers preparing to fire their bows again, Xiao Zhang said those two words.

His face was covered in that white sheet of paper, so it wasn't possible to see the expression on his face. However, based on how cold the voice coming through the paper was, Xiao Zhang was probably expressionless.

Of course, he didn't turn around, even though those two words were clearly meant for Wang Po.

Wang Po knew Xiao Zhang's personality and so did not find this strange. He turned and began walking upstream, as the Imperial

Guard had not reached the banks of the river there.

Due to his severe injuries and the fact that he was in the water, he moved rather slowly, but his attitude was straightforward and he displayed no hesitation.

On the contrary, Xiao Zhang felt rather strange. He turned and asked, "I say 'leave' and you leave?"

Without turning around or stopping, Wang Po replied, "You said for me to leave, so, naturally, I'm leaving."

Xiao Zhang was rather unhappy, blurting out with his raspy voice, "You're not even saying 'thank you'?"

Wang Po still did not turn around, just raised his hand in the air and waved it around to show his thanks.

Xiao Zhang was furious, commenting, "What sort of person is this?"

He didn't know that right now, a warm smile had appeared on Wang Po's face.

After Xun Mei's death, he had stopped saying 'thank you' to other people.

At the activity in the river, the crowd on the shore became

restless. Two-hundred-some cavalry split off from the Imperial Guard and galloped upstream along the willow-lined official road.

It was obvious that these cavalry intended to intercept and kill Wang Po. Even if Xiao Zhang was able to hold back the two Divine Generals and the Tang Second Master, he could not hold everyone back.

Dust rose amongst the willows and hooves thundered, the mood extremely tense and dangerous. Crucially, the sound of hooves could also be heard from the other shore.

The capital was vast and the Luo River long, but it seemed impossible for Wang Po to find a place to come ashore today.

With his heavy injuries, he could still die at any moment.

Suddenly, a sword glow flashed amongst the willows, a sword intent appeared.

The sword glow was bright like Golden Crows flying into the sky as they sought to set all ablaze. The sword intent was very upright, just like a mountain gate.

The willows splintered and warhorses crashed to the ground. The sounds of a sword tearing through metal and the wretched cries of the wounded rose up from the road.

As the dust settled, it revealed a person with his sword bared

standing on the road, with ten-some cavalry collapsed before him in pools of blood.

This person was a youth.

To break through into Star Condensation at such an age was a rare sight, even amongst Wang Po's generation.

To refine the Mountain Gate Sword and the Sword of the Golden Crow into a single technique...even in the Mount Li Sword Sect, his talent in the sword was only below Qiushan Jun's.

He was the Fourth Law of the Divine Kingdom's Seven Laws, Guan Feibai.

Soon after, several more people charged out of the willow forest. Without hesitation, they leapt into the icy cold Luo River and swam with all their might to Wang Po.

They were students and teachers from Scholartree Manor.

With the sound of wheels rolling across stone, three extremely luxurious carriages arrived on the shore of the Luo River.

A middle-aged man descended from the foremost carriage. It was the leader of the Qiushan clan.

The other two carriages remained quiet and nobody descended

from them. However, anyone could see that they were probably the leaders of the two noble clans of the south on a similar level to the Qiushan clan.

Mount Li's Guan Feibai, the teachers and students of Scholartree Manor, and the clan heads of the south's noble clans had all attended the celebrations for the confluence of the north and south.

After the conclusion of the festivities, they did not leave, instead temporarily remaining in the capital.

In the past, if such a situation were to occur, the people of Scholartree Manor would naturally put everything on the line to save Wang Po, and with Guan Feibai's personality and the Mount Li Sword Sect's style of doing things, he probably also would have acted. However, the Qiushan clan head and the other two clan heads would never have appeared amongst the willows lining the Luo River.

In the past, Wang Po was famed for his talent in cultivation, but this fame would not have been enough for these noble clans to offend the Great Zhou Imperial Court with the confluence of the north and south in the background.

However, now was different. Wang Po had entered the capital and comprehended the blade, breaking through and slaying the Divine, proclaiming to the entire continent his power.

An expert of the Divine Domain who had proved his power and a

cultivation genius with boundless prospects were two completely different things.

With the departure of Su Li and the Holy Maiden of the south, the most intractable problem facing the south which made them uneasy and even fearful was that they lacked a supreme expert to keep watch.

Now they had one.

Although Wang Po was heavily wounded and could die at any moment, if he could survive, the south would have one more expert of the Divine Domain.

No, he was the south's only expert of the Divine Domain.

Thus, the Qiushan clan and all the people of the south would not permit Wang Po to be killed by the Imperial Court.

They absolutely would not.

Chapter 713 – The Old Matter of Ten Thousand Swords

Wang Po was born in Tianliang and was thus no southerner, but because of those grudges he had with the Great Zhou Imperial Court, the people of the south were more than willing to accept him.

As a result, when he became master of Scholartree Manor, he was not confronted with vigilance and hostility, but welcome.

Compared to Su Li, Wang Po had a temperament and character much more amenable to the southerners, was more trustworthy and reliable.

To put it another way, he was far more suitable than Su Li to be the flagbearer of the south, but first, he needed to raise that flag.

All the south had been waiting for the day when he broke through and became Divine, but no one had expected that day to come so soon, so suddenly that no preparations had been made.

Today, his blade had cut through the sky of the capital and raised the flag to let it flap in the wind, and the south finally welcomed its flagbearer.

Other than those legendary existences for which there was no written record, he was the youngest person ever to enter the Divine Domain.

Perhaps in the future, a person in the generation of youths represented by Qiushan Jun might surpass this achievement, but no one could know for sure.

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On the shore of the Luo River, the three carriages slowly retreated, the willow branches swaying in the breeze powerless to detain them.

The Tang Second Master watched this scene with an incredibly gloomy expression, but did nothing. The two Divine Generals and the several hundred cavalry of the Imperial Guard also kept silent.

The three carriages did not seem that remarkable, but they represented the entire south, and their stance was exceptionally clear.

They could do nothing, as their actions would be tantamount to the Imperial Court and the Wenshui Tangs engaging in hostilities with the entire south.

No person could bear this responsibility, not even someone like the Tang Second Master, an important personage dispatched to the capital by the Wenshui Tangs.

In the entire capital, even the entire continent, there was only one person able to bear such a responsibility.

The venerable master of the Dao, Shang Xingzhou.

The Tang Second Master drew back his gaze from that sight and turned to look northward.

Two tasks needed to be done today, and one had already failed. The remaining task was even more important.

The position of Pope represented the Orthodoxy's vast ocean of resources and power, so not a single problem could be allowed to occur.

Chen Changsheng had to die.

The clouds and snow were like a flock of sheep urged on by the whip as they slowly traveled across the gloomy sky.

The Saint from White Emperor City was in the Li Palace, momentarily keeping things in balance.

The southerners would not concern themselves with Chen Changsheng's life or death, nor did they care about the ultimate successor of the Orthodoxy. And someone like the Qiushan clan head was more than willing to see Chen Changsheng die.

There was probably no one coming to Chen Changsheng's rescue.

Viewed this way, one could barely consider themselves to have broken even from today's events.

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The three carriages departed the capital with no one blocking their way.

The snow-covered Wuli Plains were visible across the Bai River. Once they crossed the bridge, they would be on the road back to the south.

Guan Feibai asked the carriage to stop, said a few words to the Qiushan clan head, bowed, then prepared to leave.

The curtain of the front carriage was lifted, revealing Wang Po's still rather wan face.

"What are you going to do?"

Guan Feibai replied, "That guy is probably in a lot of trouble. I'm going to see if I can help him out a little."

He spoke very naturally, as if this was the expected course of action. Thus, even the steadiness of his voice gave off an aura of bold self-confidence.

Wang Po smiled and thought to himself, the Mount Li Sword Sect is truly extraordinary. These young disciples are all much stronger than Senior Su Li.

"There's no need to go. That fellow has his own plans and doesn't require any more help," he explained.

As they had walked from the Assistant Minister's estate to the northern part of the city, they had chatted about many things by the Luo River. They had spoken of Wang Zhice and the Garden of Zhou, the path of the blade and the soul of the sword, and, naturally, they had chatted about that mission they were about to undertake.

That fellow had requested his help in hindering Tie Shu, but he had made no other request.

Wang Po had done even more, slaying Tie Shu, so that fellow could naturally finish off everything else.

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Snow fell amongst the ruins, falling onto that fellow's shoulders.

A sword glow stretched out of the snowstorm like a lightning bolt.

At this moment, the sword glow was still ten-some zhang from Chen Changsheng, but its arrival was imminent. Such a distance practically did not exist with respect to a Star Condensation expert's sword.

Chen Changsheng did not look at it, his eyes remaining fixed on Xiao De. He treated that sword glow as if it didn't exist, making him seem excessively arrogant.

But it was not so in reality. The moment this sword glow appeared, he had already struck with his sword, but only the nearby Xiao De had noticed.

A crisp clang resonated through this courtyard located in the depths of the alley of the Northern Military Department.

It was the sound of two swords clashing.

The snow instantly dispersed as an expert of the Department for Purging Officials was forced into revealing himself as he retreated with a groan.

A chip the size of a grain of rice appeared on the sword in his hands.

This sword was the sword of his sect and he treasured it dearly, but he had no time to be heartbroken, as his heart was utterly overcome with shock.

He stared at the air in front of him, his face so pale that it was like he had seen a ghost.

An ancient sword floated in the air, giving off a low hum.

What sort of sword was this? How was it able to damage his sect's sword?

More importantly....where had this sword come from?

While he floundered in a state of shock, another sword glow stabbed towards Chen Changsheng from the snow.

This sword glow was even more sinister, rising up from the ground two feet away and approaching from a remarkably crafty angle. It even carried a little aura of the sword style used by the shaman tribe.

Chen Changsheng saw this sword glow, but he still did not move.

The snow flurried and an old sword appeared in front of the sword glow, seemingly popping out of midair.

The two swords clashed several times.

With a yowl, an assassin of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets tumbled from a tree and into the snow, blood pouring out of a wound on his left arm.

"What's going on!"

The assassin shouted in shock as he used a movement technique and madly waved his sword, exhausting all his methods to resist the old sword's pursuit.

Then several thunderclaps boomed through the air.

Several experts of the Great Zhou Army, who had been attempting a surprise attack, groaned as they were jolted back towards the walls of the courtyard.

The hands they were using to hold their swords were trembling and their faces were grave.

Several more swords appeared in the air, but these swords were much thicker and heavier than the swords from earlier.

Even after being corroded by the passing of centuries, these heavy swords still held a terrifying might.

A strange atmosphere enveloped the entire courtyard.

No one else attacked.

With a hum, the old sword chasing the assassin from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets flew through the snow and floated in front of Chen Changsheng.

Ten-some swords quietly floated in the air around his body, carrying the snowflakes falling from the sky and guarding all angles.

These swords had different appearances and different Qis, but they all shared one common trait: they were all very old.

There was even some rust still visible on some of these swords, but it could not conceal their sharpness.

This sight made the experts of the Imperial Court recall that rumor. Their faces turned incredibly grim, and some even began to show fear.

If that rumor was true, then these swords were only the beginning.

Just as expected, they soon heard many more sounds.

Clangclangclang!

This was not the sound of swords rubbing against their sheaths,

but the edges of the swords tearing through the air.

Countless swords flew from Chen Changsheng's body.

They were like a school of fish constantly swimming about a deep pond.

Sword intent exploded in the courtyard and sword glows burst forth, burying even the wind and snow beneath them.

Chapter 714 – I Am Invincible Against Opponents of the Same Level

A rumor had been circulating for the past two years, but no one had believed it, so it was gradually forgotten.

The rumor had just been too absurd.

Regardless of how talented Chen Changsheng was in the path of the sword, it was still absurd.

Today, these experts finally saw this rumored sight and realized that the rumor had actually been true.

This was truly too absurd.

First, one actually had to possess this many swords.

Secondly, one had to have a powerful enough spiritual sense, so powerful that it exceeded the boundaries of imagination, stable to a freakish level, in order to control so many swords. In addition, it wasn't simply controlling them. If one could only use their spiritual sense to have these swords hack and stab, unable to perform anything more complicated or make any sort of prompt response, such a technique would have no meaning against Star Condensation experts like them and they could act as if these swords did not exist.

Yes, one had to have so many swords, a spiritual sense powerful enough to control all of them, and a plethora of sword techniques.

These demands were too high, so logically speaking, someone capable of doing it should not exist under the starry sky.

Yet these conditions seemed custom-made for Chen Changsheng.

He had this many swords and he could control them, or to put it another way, these swords were willing to obey his will. In addition, he had many, many sword styles.

Consequently, Chen Changsheng could perform this seemingly absurd feat.

Thus, to the experts of the Imperial Court, today's battle had become an absurd affair.

Chen Changsheng just needed to simultaneously have these swords in the air use their techniques, and it was the equivalent of several dozen, even several hundred, Chen Changshengs attacking.

How could they fight against this?

Snowflakes drifted down from the sky onto Chen Changsheng's shoulder, painting it with a thin layer of white.

At the same time, snowflakes also fell on the several hundred

swords surrounding him, creating many white lines hanging in the air.

He walked forward, and the several hundred swords in the air silently followed.

This was a bizarre and fear-inducing sight.

These swords all vibrated in the snow, giving off no sound. Only when some external force disturbed them would they begin to hum.

Several sword glows suddenly illuminated a place in the snowstorm, several crisp clangs and dull thuds resounding at almost the same time.

Blood splattered onto the ground.

A shattered sword stabbed completely into a wall.

The sword glows instantly dispersed and all returned to silence.

Two experts of the Imperial Court had attempted a surprise attack, but before they could pass through the net of several hundred swords, they were injured and forced to retreat.

A few traces still remained in the wind and snow. From these, one could see the general appearance of the True Sword of the

Orthodoxy's second move and Gathering Evening Clouds of the Three Forms of Wenshui.

Chen Changsheng walked out of the wrecked courtyard and the several hundred swords followed, pouring over the walls of the courtyard like fish swimming past a rock.

The courtyard he walked into contained a large water jar with a thin layer of ice formed over it.

Chen Changsheng glanced in its direction.

Several hundred swords moved with his gaze and aimed at the water jar.

Kakakaka, countless cutting sounds almost simultaneously rang out, cutting the thin layer of ice into pieces along with the water jar itself.

With a splash, water spilled out of the shattered jar and washed the snow on the ground into disarray. At the same time, a blood-drenched assassin dropped to the ground.

The assassin's body was covered all over in sword slashes from which blood poured out, but it was like he couldn't feel the pain. He only stared in shock at Chen Changsheng.

"Retreat a little farther!" an official of the Department for Purging Officials yelled out.

They were all Star Condensation experts with rich experience in battle, and so reacted very quickly. As long as they were far enough away, the threat presented by these swords would be much weaker.

Some people estimated that the safe distance was about eight zhang.

Instantly, several dozen experts flew through the air, dispersing into the courtyard's surroundings, leaving a distance of around ten-some zhang between them and Chen Changsheng. However, none of them left.

Chen Changsheng's steps did not slow in the slightest at this sight. He continued forward, very quickly returning to that courtyard within the alley of the Northern Military Department.

The crabapple tree here had no leaves and its bare branches stretching into the sky took up very little space.

But when several hundred swords arrived in the courtyard, the space became rather cramped.

Cut branches were not fallen leaves. When they dropped down, they would not rustle.

That crabapple tree that had moved from a mountain on the outskirts of the capital just a few weeks ago silently transformed

into countless chunks of wood piled on the snow.

This sight was still bizarre.

Swords filled the courtyard, emanating a swift and fierce aura.

The world was enveloped in awe-inspiring sword intents.

Anyone who wished to break through these swords and attack Chen Changsheng would have to take on the full brunt of these awe-inspiring sword intents.

On the snowy street, he and Wang Po had parted ways to carry out their own duties.

Wang Po had gone to battle Tie Shu, as he was skilled at fighting as the weak against the strong. The facts had proved that he had truly accomplished this.

Chen Changsheng had come to the courtyard to kill Zhou Tong because he was skilled at fighting as one against many.

"You've finally used your strongest technique?"

Xiao De stood at the stone gate of the courtyard, watching Chen Changsheng.

At this moment, Chen Changsheng was standing on the stone steps. The distance between the two was not near and not far, not more and not less. It was precisely eight zhang.

This distance was indicative of many things. Firstly, Xiao De also did not have the confidence to resist the collective attack of several hundred swords. Secondly, he seemed to have a deep understanding of Chen Changsheng's techniques.

This was evidenced by his words.

Several days ago, Eunuch Lin had suffered severe injuries in the Orthodox Academy, shocking many people who were aware of what had actually occurred.

To people on Xiao De's level, Chen Changsheng's techniques had long since ceased to be a secret.

"Against people of the same cultivation level, you truly could be considered invincible."

Xiao De continued speaking, his voice somewhat melancholy.

To be invincible against opponents of the same level seemed a rather ordinary feat, but it was not actually so.

In the past thousand years, not a single person had been able to do this, not a single one.

Before he broke through, Wang Po had been about the same level of strength as Xue Xingchuan. When Su Li had been at the initial level of Star Condensation, he had once been beaten like a dog by some girl from the snowy plains of the north. Even Zhou Dufu, acclaimed as the supreme expert under the starry sky, when he was at the upper level of Ethereal Opening, had not been a match for the mature Chen Xuanba, even when Chen Xuanba was also at the upper level of Ethereal Opening.

Right now, Chen Changsheng was truly able to be invincible against cultivators of the same level.

He was currently at the initial level of Star Condensation, and there were faint signs that he was about to break into the next level.

But let alone initial level Star Condensation experts, even middle level Star Condensation experts would not be able to defeat him.

Not a single one.

It just wasn't possible.

Because the number of swords he possessed represented the number of selves he could have.

To fight him was to fight against hundreds of him.

Who could fight against him?

"Fortunately, you're just invincible against opponents of the same level."

Xiao De sighed, then said, "Or else I really would have to turn and leave."

Chapter 715 – The Original Point of the Matter Is Still Killing

"Thus, this technique of yours is useless against me," Xiao De very solemnly declared to Chen Changsheng.

Adding more hot water into a wooden basin wouldn't make the water start boiling, and a pile of mud higher than the Mausoleum of Books would still not be harder than rock. Even if Chen Changsheng really could become ten thousand Chen Changshengs, he could not rely on this increase in numbers to break into a higher level.

This was not a concept difficult to understand.

Cultivating was the most unfeeling matter in the world. It had never been believed that diligence could make up for lack of talent, or that a change in quantity could effect a change in quality.

Right now, he could simultaneously fight against many initial level, or even middle level, Star Condensation experts, but it would be very difficult for him to kill them all. More importantly, against peak Star Condensation experts like Xiao De or Xiao Zhang, the gap in cultivation levels would drastically decrease the advantage offered to him by quantity.

In the Garden of Zhou, he had been able to fight against the Golden-winged Great Peng not because he was just that strong, but because the ten thousand swords awakened from the Sword Pool had converted all the longing they had accumulated over the

centuries into fighting intent. Only this way were they able to use an ultimate sword technique that shook the world.

Now, the Garden of Zhou was still and the famous swords had returned to their respective mountains. Those swords that remained at his side had been tempered and nurtured within the sea of the Vault Sheath, gradually becoming new again, but they could no longer condense that sort of fighting intent. To put it another way, the mystical sight of ten thousand swords becoming a dragon could no longer appear on this world.

"Of course, you're still very frightening." Xiao De, melancholic over the present and fearful of the future, said to him, "If I let you live, what sort of situation will you and your swords create once you reach the peak of Star Condensation?"

If it truly was as Xiao De said, the Chen Changsheng of the future could fight as one against an entire army, could besiege a city and destroy kingdoms.

"At that time, people like us would not have the slightest ability to resist you, would be beaten as dogs by you."

Xiao De paused for a few moments, then continued saying to Chen Changsheng, "And this is unfair to us."

All was still in the courtyard. The shattered crabapple tree was dead and even the wind no longer blew between those suspended swords, not daring to move them.

When the experts of the Imperial Court heard Xiao De's words, they fell into thought, all sorts of emotions appearing on their faces.

Chen Changsheng did not reply, his somewhat thin lips still pursed into a line.

It was just like the several hundred lines formed by the swords in the snowy sky.

No cultivator was willing to see this sort of future, was willing to become a dog beaten at the sword of some peerless expert. And anyway, they were enemies.

To prevent this terrifying future from occurring, all they could do, and what they had to do, was kill Chen Changsheng.

Xiao De still calmly stared at Chen Changsheng. Suddenly, a tawny light poured out of his eyes and terrifying Qi burst out of his body.

This Qi was overflowing with a primitive and barbaric aura, even the smallest strand of it seeming to flow with the blood of beasts.

His clothes were bursting at the seams as muscles bulged beneath. Then, the clothes were stabbed through by iron-like and dense needles of fur.

There was a deep wound on his chest, inflicted by Chen

Changsheng's Blazing Sword in their first exchange. It had been bleeding this entire time, but now it suddenly closed up and vanished.

Chen Changsheng tightened his grip on his sword, knowing that Xiao De was about to use his most powerful technique.

Demi-humans had many incomparable advantages over humans, such as speed, strength, and the natural toughness of their bodies. However, their strongest advantage was that demi-human experts could transform their bodies for a short time, borrowing the blood of their ancestors held within the wheel of fate to become faster, stronger, and tougher.

This was the berserk metamorphosis.

A hum could be heard in the courtyard. The crabapple branches scattered about the ground were taken up by a fierce wind, smashed against the walls, and turned into even finer pieces.

Xiao De vanished from the stone gate and appeared in front of Chen Changsheng.

The several hundred swords that hummed as they vibrated in the air suddenly went still.

In the space of several breaths, Xiao De had crossed the eight zhang of distance and been cut at by six swords.

However, the exquisite sword techniques used by these six swords were unable to slow his steps.

His body bore the slightly bleeding marks of six swords.

As the supreme expert of the middle generation of demi-humans, his body possessed a frightening level of toughness, which reached an outrageous level after the berserk metamorphosis. If not for the fact that all of Chen Changsheng's swords had come from the Sword Pool and were all famous swords from several centuries ago, they might not have been able to even wound him.

In the snow, Xiao De's fist hurtled towards Chen Changsheng.

Just like at the start, in their first exchange outside the walls, he still did not use any weapons.

After returning from Mount Han, Xiao De had become a much more composed person, and he had also made many advancements in cultivation. The greatest difference was that he had become more confident in his fists.

He did have a weapon, but on the mountain path of Mount Han, he had not even had time to take it out before being stabbed by Liu Qing.

Then, in the persimmon forest by the stream, he had met the Demon Lord, and his weapon was nothing but a joke, whether he could take it out or not.

After that, Xiao De gave up on weapons and only used his hands.

Compared to swords, blades, or magical artifacts, hands were weapons that truly belonged to a cultivator.

To strike with one's hands was much faster than striking with a sword.

And it was also faster than Chen Changsheng's sword.

Before Chen Changsheng had any chance to strike with his sword, Xiao De's fist arrived. Fortunately, he had been carrying the Yellow Paper Umbrella in his left hand this entire time.

The umbrella borrowed the wind to rise and block Xiao De's fist.

The umbrella canvas depressed as a massive force was transmitted through it. With a boom, Chen Changsheng's left foot sank deeply into the ground.

A spider web of cracks formed around his left foot, a depression appearing in the gray flagstones like a vortex.

A few cracks came from Chen Changsheng's body. Some bone in his body had cracked, perhaps snapped.

A sword glow that was so excessively sharp that it seemed biting

shone from the brim of the Yellow Paper Umbrella.

With a roar, Xiao De raised his fist and brought it down again, a gale exploding around it. The branches of the crabapple tree were now completely scoured from the courtyard, the walls covered in countless cracks as shards of stone were constantly peeled off them. In an instant, it seemed as if the walls had passed through tens of thousands of years.

Just as the fist smashed down like a mountain, the experts of the Imperial Court launched a joint assault against Chen Changsheng. The courtyard was filled with sword intent as all sorts of sword techniques were used.

After some time, the courtyard became peaceful once more.

Xiao De borrowed the force of the countershock to roll back to the stone gate of the courtyard, seemingly uninjured.

Suddenly, a scraping sound was heard from his face.

With this sound, a sword wound widened on his face until it was about half an inch wide. This horrifying wound was so deep that bone was visible and blood poured out.

Chen Changsheng, standing in front of the stone steps, sheathed his sword.

Several tough hairs dropped from the air and fell onto the

ground, clattering like iron needles.

With this sound, Chen Changsheng began to cough, incessantly cough, his face paling with each cough. His feet pressed into the shattered stone faintly trembled and his body swayed on the verge of collapse.

It was very obvious that he had suffered injuries even worse than Xiao De's.

Xiao De had a very grave expression, but it was not because he had been injured by Chen Changsheng, not because his toughened body could not resist the Stainless Sword ranked on the Tier of Legendary Weapons. Instead, it was because there was no sign of a wound inflicted by a sword on Chen Changsheng's body. This meant that in the chaotic battle just now, not one of the several dozen swords from the experts of the Imperial Court had been able to get close to Chen Changsheng.

In the face of Xiao De's full-strength blow, Chen Changsheng had clearly suffered significant injury, so how had he been able to also control those several hundred swords?

Xiao De was very confused. It must be known that though Chen Changsheng's spiritual sense was far stronger than that of ordinary cultivators, it was not too absurd to experts like Xiao De.

Just how had Chen Changsheng managed to do it?

Xiao De silently stared at the several hundred swords floating in the air.

He did not understand this matter, but he could at least be sure that if Chen Changsheng wanted to simultaneously control all these swords, he had to fiercely consume his spiritual sense.

In this sort of battle, it was likely that although Chen Changsheng had still not collapsed, his spiritual sense had already run dry.

"Just how long can you last?"

Xiao De drew his gaze back from the swords and turned to Chen Changsheng. "If you insist on staying here, the ending will only be me beating you to death with fist after fist."

Several hundred swords quietly floated in the air, guarding Chen Changsheng's surroundings.

This could be regarded as a defensive sword array, or an offensive vanguard camp, but it was also a prison cell.

It was difficult for others to assault this prison cell, but it was also difficult for Chen Changsheng to walk out, because he did not dare to open the door.

So how long could he last?

"I don't know." Chen Changsheng considered the question a little more, then said, "I can at least last until Zhou Tong is dead."

At this answer, Xiao De finally understood and was somewhat flabbergasted.

In truth, Chen Changsheng had already made his stance clear, but he knew that the experts of the Imperial Court surrounding him would not believe it.

But now, Xiao De was beginning to believe him more and more, because Chen Changsheng still had not left, was still standing in front of the stone steps.

Chen Changsheng was here, so Xiao De and so many experts of the Imperial Court could also only remain here.

The Great Zhou Imperial Court had originally planned to kill Wang Po and Chen Changsheng, but now, Xiao De had given up on this notion.

He knew that Chen Changsheng still had tricks up his sleeve. With just the swords floating in the air, there was simply no way Chen Changsheng could have defeated Eunuch Lin in the Orthodox Academy.

If Chen Changsheng were to use this trick, he could at least break out of the encirclement.

Why was he not leaving? Was he really just delaying for time, waiting for someone else to kill Zhou Tong?

Chen Changsheng said nothing more. He had already given his answer, and twice at that.

At the very start of today, he and Wang Po had wanted to kill Zhou Tong.

Later on, it evolved into the Imperial Court using this matter to kill him and Wang Po.

The situation was changing the entire time, constantly swinging back and forth.

That person had not once appeared, most likely held in the Imperial Palace by his senior brother.

The Li Palace had been quiet this entire time, presumably subdued temporarily by that Saint, but that Saint would naturally be powerless to do anything else.

Of the entire situation, the most critical change was that Tie Shu had been unable to kill Wang Po. On the contrary, Wang Po had killed him.

Thus, everything returned to the source.

This matter returned to its most original point.

It was still about killing Zhou Tong.

So he would endure here, endure until Zhou Tong was dead.

He believed that Zhou Tong's death was assured.

No matter who he was killed by, he would still be killed.

Chapter 716 – [Netherworld](#) (I)

For many reasons, Chen Changsheng had to kill Zhou Tong. The most important of these reasons was that the coup of the Mausoleum of Books had essentially started from his last attempt to kill Zhou Tong.

When he walked into this courtyard last time, it was the beginning of a shift in history, the source of all life and death. Now, the Tianhai Divine Empress was dead, many other people had died, and the river of history had flowed through a big bend. Yet Zhou Tong was still living well, and even better than he had lived before. Chen Changsheng felt that it was right that he finish off this matter.

Even though he didn't even know where Zhou Tong was at present.

Just then, he and Xiao De lowered their heads at the same time, gazing at the remnants of snow on the ground of the courtyard.

This snow was slightly trembling, as if some faint vibration was coming from the depths of the earth.

Several officials of the Department for Purging Officials glanced at each other with expressions of bewilderment. The shock in their eyes quickly transformed into resolve, and the officials all tightly gripped their swords and turned to Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng did not look at them. His eyes remained fixed

on the snow.

Suddenly, ten-some sword glows illuminated the courtyard as they slashed down at the ground.

The snow madly danced and the sword intent was swift and fierce. The flagstones were instantly shattered and black earth was sent flying. In but a moment, a hole around half a foot deep was dug into the ground.

Those officials furiously roared, each displaying their mightiest sword techniques in an attempt to force Chen Changsheng to stop.

Xiao De vaguely guessed at what was happening and the vicious light in his eyes exploded, his two fists crashing down like mountains at those several hundred swords in the air.

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This courtyard once held crabapple trees, but they had been destroyed by Chen Changsheng. Later on, a new crabapple tree had been moved in, almost identical to the old ones. Even the cold-blooded and ruthless officials of the Department for Purging Officials who had no interest in objects of beauty had to click their tongues in wonder at such a sight. Of course, this crabapple tree had also been destroyed, similarly at Chen Changsheng's hands.

The Department for Purging Officials had taken great pains and needed much time to find an exactly identical crabapple tree. It had also taken a long time to dig out that hole by the wall of the courtyard. There was even one autumn night where rain made this hole into a small pond, but before morning, that water had sunk into the ground and vanished without a trace.

The Department for Purging Officials was located in the alley of the Northern Military Department, and it was also referred to by the people as Zhou Prison. However, very few people knew that the true Zhou Prison was actually seventeen zhang below the hole dug for the tree, a gloomy underground cavern formed from five prison cells. All round its stone walls was tamped earth and craggy shards of stone. And there were also countless protective arrays.

This place buried deep in the ground and protected by layer after layer of arrays was a very hidden place, and no outsider had ever entered it before. This was an incredibly hardy place—whether it was by that rainbow of countless swords and fierce blade intent from Chen Changsheng's first assault on Zhou Prison, or the sword intents crisscrossing the air right now, this place was not affected in the slightest, not even by the smallest ripple.

In the deepest of these prison cells, a dusky but steady lantern illuminated the small table within the room.

On the table was a platter of peanuts, two pots of wine, and two pairs of chopsticks.

The person sitting on the east side of the table was a middle-aged man of tall and sturdy stature. Although his prison uniform was

covered in blackened blood, his hair was draped in disarray over his shoulders, and he was even missing an arm, it was impossible to conceal his heroic and soldierly aura. It was precisely Divine General Xue He, who had been seized and brought back to the capital just a few days ago. Sitting across from him was another middle-aged man. This person was not dressed in official attire, but wore an ordinary set of cloth garments. He had a slim figure, deepset cheeks, a pale face, and deep and serene eyes. He looked just like a ghost.

Many people had died in Zhou Prison, but it was not known whether it was haunted by ghosts or not. Even if it was, they had presumably long since been tortured into suffering beyond words by this person and reincarnated.

He was the master of Zhou Prison, and even ghosts feared him in this place.

The breathtaking sword from earlier that had stabbed through the him on the palace armchair had only stabbed through that red official's gown of his. From that point, Chen Changsheng and many other people had been guessing at where he had hidden himself. Many people thought he had hidden in the Imperial Palace, while others believed that he had already lost his wits and fled the capital.

No one could have expected that he had remained right here, right within this courtyard. He was just very deep below it.

To put it another way, he and Chen Changsheng had always been separated by about seventeen zhang.

He cared not at all about this fact. He calmly ate peanuts and drank wine as if the rain of swords above him had no relationship to him, no matter how fierce it was.

Xue He looked into his eyes and said, "You are afraid."

He was a Divine General famous throughout the Great Zhou on account of being Xue Xingchuan's younger brother, but that did not mean he was incapable. In the battlefields of the north, he had led his soldiers against the demons' wolf cavalry in a conflict that had persisted for several decades. He had a deep understanding of death and fear.

When people were at their most frightened, they would often insist on staying at the places they were most familiar with, even if it was not the wisest choice. Zhou Tong's decision to remain here instead of going to the Imperial Palace might cause others to gasp with admiration at his composure and intelligence in the aftermath, but in Xue He's view, it was only proof that Zhou Tong was frightened.

Zhou Prison, hidden deep underground, was the place Zhou Tong was most familiar with. Here, he had killed far too many humans, demi-humans, and demons; tortured far too many humans, demi-humans, and demons.

Zhou Tong did not go to the Imperial Palace because of that sense of foreboding in the depths of his heart and his distrust towards that Saint. However, he would not explain this to Xue He. Xue He

was a criminal so had no right to an explanation. Moreover, he did not want to let a single person find out that his loyalty towards that Saint was not as staunch as others imagined.

This prison deep underground was too humid and gloomy, so it was impossible to feel very comfortable here, even for Zhou Tong himself. This cell in which Xue He resided was the driest, with very long intervals between each drop of water falling from the ceiling, and the water would not fall on this table or the bed made of straw.

Naturally this counted as preferential treatment, even if the golden needles on Xue He's body that restricted his cultivation had been personally inserted by Zhou Tong.

"Don't attempt to anger me. I won't kill you. After all, he said that we were also brothers," Zhou Tong calmly replied.

Zhou Tong and Xue Xingchuan were brothers, and Xue Xingchuan was also brothers with Xue He.

Only these three brothers and Madam Xue knew of this matter.

In the past, Xue Xingchuan had always hoped that Xue He and Zhou Tong would also become true brothers.

Xue He did not like Zhou Tong, but he had never said anything.

When he discovered that Zhou Tong had personally poisoned his

elder brother to death, he was stricken with grief and indignation. However, he still managed to keep his cool, because he had never treated Zhou Tong as his brother. In addition, he knew that Zhou Tong was just that sort of person. However, when he heard these words, he could no longer control himself and spat out a mouthful of phlegm flecked with blood at him.

Zhou Tong turned to avoid it, but he did not turn back around.

He maintained this posture, staring at a certain spot on the southwest wall of the prison cell.

He could sense that a very soft but clear vibration was coming from beyond the stone wall.

Someone had triggered an array.

(TN: The Chinese term used to refer to the Underworld/Hell is 地獄, which literally translates to 'underground prison'.)

Chapter 717 – Netherworld (II)

Zhou Tong stared at the wall, his eyes turning darker and more sinister, transforming into two balls of ghostly fire.

The weak vibration seemed very ordinary, but to this underground world stabilized and protected by layer after layer of arrays, it was the omen of something terrible. Someone had touched one of Zhou Prison's arrays, and it was not like an insect that was sticking its head into a spider web, but like a zither player extending a finger and lightly plucking a string.

Zhou Tong was staring at the wall, so he did not notice a drop of water falling from a crack in the stone ceiling.

This underground space was very humid, and even though it was sealed off by the numerous arrays, there were still many places in the walls and ceiling where water seeped through. Even in this relatively dry prison cell, this sight was not too unexpected. The problem was that this drop of water had a very coincidental landing point, landing right on the rim of the wine pot.

After the filtering of stones and arrays, the water in the earth that seeped through the stone walls was without impurity, clear and clean like a dewdrop.

This dewdrop silently trickled along the slim rim of the pot and fell into the wine.

Just then, Zhou Tong turned around.

Xue He said, "Chen Changsheng has probably sensed it and guessed that you're here."

Zhou Tong knew this, so he was in a rush to leave.

He did not know who the person that had triggered the array was that they were actually able to dig so deep towards Zhou Prison.

There was still some distance until this person reached this place, but he chose without hesitation to leave.

Just as Xue He had said, that person had very possibly wanted to use this method to inform the people on the surface of Zhou Tong's specific position.

Zhou Tong calmly said, "There have always been many people that wanted to kill me."

"So do I."

Xue He took up his own wine pot and filled his empty cup.

Zhou Tong took the other wine pot and filled his own cup.

Xue He raised the cup and cheered, "I wish you a very slow death."

Death was a very frightening matter, but if it had happened fast enough, it could be considered a [delight](#). If it was very slow, then naturally it was only pain that remained.

Zhou Tong laughed, lightly clinked cups, and then emptied the cup.

"No matter how fast Chen Changsheng's sword is, he can't possibly arrive here that quickly."

Zhou Tong's gaze turned once more to that now-silent stone wall.

This place was the most secretive and safest hiding spot he had created for himself, but now he chose without hesitation to abandon it and seek another place to hide.

No matter how much Xue He loathed this man, even he had to admit that this was truly a most formidable decision. At the same time, he was also quite curious, asking, "Although I don't know how big the snowstorm is today, I can imagine that there are not many places in the capital that can ensure your safety, so where can you go?"

"A rabbit will have three holes that it can flee from at any time, but that's just a minimum for people in my line of work."

Zhou Tong continued, "You will definitely feel regret that an evil man like me is truly not easy to kill. Today, at least, I will not die."

After saying this, he said no more. He walked out of the prison cell and followed a gloomy tunnel towards an even gloomier place.

The bean-like lanterns lining this tunnel were similar to the glimmer in his eyes, both gloomy balls of ghostly fire.

His figure gradually vanished at the end of the tunnel, as if he was walking into the Netherworld, all the way until he walked into the deepest darkness.

Separated by metal bars, Xue He stared at Zhou Tong's back in silence. He watched for a very long time, still watching even after Zhou Tong had vanished.

He was not feeling some sort of sorrow, nor was he feeling some complex mixture of emotions. He just wanted to make sure that Zhou Tong had truly left.

Another drop of water fell from the ceiling, and then the sound of scraping came from the wall.

Two hard pieces of stone were moved aside and a ball of mud squeezed out from between them.

It was not actual mud, but a person that had lived in the earth for several weeks.

On the night of the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, Chen Changsheng was brought to the Mausoleum of Books by the Divine Empress, Tang Tang was kidnapped back to Wenshui by the Tang Second Master, and Zhexiu disappeared.

No one was able to find any trace of him, whether it was the Imperial Court, the Li Palace, or the Orthodox Academy.

As it turned out, he had been hiding in the alley of the Northern Military Department this entire time, just very deep underground.

A detailed explanation would be very long and complex, but the truth of it was very simple.

In order to plant the crabapple tree, the Department for Purging Officials had dug a hole. He had jumped into this hole and remained underground right up until this moment.

No one would have been able to fathom just how he had managed to survive over the weeks.

But to Zhexiu, this was a very ordinary matter.

He was a wolf, possessing unimaginable patience and persistence. To catch his prey, he could wait a very long time, could endure a hunger and thirst that humans could not. In order to kill the cavalry the demons posted on the frontlines, he would often wait deep within the snow, often for several weeks. Although snow was much looser than earth, it was much colder.

Zhou Tong was the strongest prey he had ever faced and also the prey that he most desired to kill, so he had displayed even more patience. Of course, he had also paid no small price.

His face was very pale and his body much thinner, and though his eyes still had their cold and focused gaze, he was clearly much weaker than he was several weeks ago.

Xue He looked at him and asked, "Were you the one that triggered the array?"

"No, I don't understand arrays, nor did I know that Chen Changsheng would come."

Zhexiu's voice was very hoarse, both because he had drunk very little water in the past several weeks and because he rarely spoke.

Xue He recalled that on the day he had been jailed in this deepest prison cell, the voice coming from the wall had been very low and also very hoarse.

At the time, he didn't know who was in the wall, a person or ghost, but after he finished listening to whatever this thing had to say, he decided to cooperate with it, even if it was a ghost.

Xue He extended a hand and pulled a golden needle out of his bloodstained clothes, his brow creasing as he gave a pained groan.

The ten-some needles in his body had all been pulled out, but only by one-third their length. This was something he and Zhexiu had prepared ahead of time.

According to the original plan, he would coordinate with Zhexiu to think of a way to poison Zhou Tong, and then do his utmost to delay for time until the poison could work on Zhou Tong. Zhexiu would then burst out of the wall and join hands with Xue He to make trouble. At the beginning, reality proved to be even smoother than imagination. The poisoning had easily succeeded, but unexpectedly, someone triggered the array and frightened Zhou Tong away.

It was very obvious that this person hidden in the shadows did not know of Zhexiu's existence, let alone Zhexiu's plan, but they also wanted to kill Zhou Tong.

Xue He said, "You go and inform Chen Changsheng and I'll chase after Zhou Tong."

Zhexiu did not voice his objection, but that did not mean he had given his silent agreement, only that he did not care for what Xue He said.

He passed a ring of keys to Xue He, walked out of the cell, and walked in the direction that Zhou Tong had vanished.

At first, he walked very slowly. He was weak and he had spent the last few weeks clambering through the earth. He had not relied on his legs to walk for quite some time.

It didn't take long for his movement to become more harmonious. Although his pace was not fast, it was steady enough.

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Zhou Tong walked through the gloomy tunnel, turning back at certain intervals. Occasionally, a door would descend and then be concealed in earth.

These underground tunnels were as dense as a spider web, and after such mechanisms were triggered, they became even more complex. He was confident that even if someone helped Chen Changsheng break out of the Imperial Court's encirclement, Chen Changsheng found Zhou Prison's true position, and he then launched an attack underground, he still would not be able to find Zhou Tong.

Thinking about this greatly soothed his mind, and he rubbed his chest with his hand.

His brow furrowed as he discovered that his heartbeat was somewhat fast. Was he walking too fast, or was it something else?

Like...fear.

He was not willing to admit that he was afraid. He took a deep breath and secretly moved his true essence, preparing to slightly slow his heartbeat.

True essence smoothly flowed through his meridians, just like water flowing through a canal, when suddenly, it encountered an impassable wall.

He felt a twinge of pain at his chest.

He began to vomit blood.

The blood was black.

(TN: The term for delight here is 痛快, which uses the words for both 'pain' and 'fast'. 快 can also mean pleasant.)

Chapter 718 – The Sunlight of the Courtyard Shines upon the Brewing Medicine by the Window

Zhou Tong stopped, his eyes narrowing.

Even in the dim light of the lanterns, he could still clearly see the color of the blood. The black blood was rather striking.

He felt that the heart underneath his palm was beating faster and faster, causing his hand and arm to tremble with it. Then his shoulders began to tremble, and then his entire body.

His face became abnormally pale, as if he had been afflicted by some grave illness in this brief span of time.

He had been poisoned, and with a fierce and very rare poison.

He had been able to conclude so quickly that this was a very rare poison because the Department for Purging Officials was the place most skilled in the use of poisons.

The poisons he personally saw and used were more numerous than the different foods a normal person ate in their entire life.

When had he been poisoned? The gloomy light in his squinted eyes continuously flickered as he recalled this past period. Although there were no clues, he very quickly determined who had

poisoned him and when he had been poisoned. These did not require proof, only reverse deduction based on time and the grasp of a few details.

His poisoner was probably still there, but he did not turn around, because what he needed to prioritize was leaving.

He took a handtowel from his sleeve and wiped the foul blood from his lips, then continued walking forward, very quickly vanishing into the darkness.

After some time, a soft sound rose from the darkness. The gloomy lanterns on the stone walls revived, shining upon Zhexiu's pale face streaked with dried mud.

He crouched down and dipped a hand into the foul blood, brought it up to his nose, and sniffed.

The foul black blood exuded a faint fishy scent atop those blade-like fingers glimmering with cold light.

He was very satisfied and continued in pursuit along the trail of Qi, swiftly vanishing into the darkness.

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The tunnels under the Department for Purging Officials spread out like a spider web and were extraordinarily complex. They were also longer than one might imagine, leading directly to very distant places. If possible, if this were any ordinary time, Zhou Tong would have spent much longer in the tunnels, winding through many paths, activating many more mechanisms, all to ensure his absolute safety.

This was not possible today, because a fierce poison ran through his body.

This poison was completely different from the poisons commonly used by the Department for Purging Officials. It did not particularly target the meridians, the star openings, or the sea of consciousness. Instead, it pervaded the organs like sand, imparting a coarse and rough sensation that made him think about the vast plains of the north.

This sort of poison that was so incredibly close to nature might not even be treatable using the Sacred Light technique. However, very few people in the world had his level of knowledge in poisons, and he could even be considered a grandmaster in this aspect. Even if he had not seen this type of poison before, he knew how he should set out to deal with it. In order to take care of such a poison, only medicine would do, and it had to be medicine made with herbs. Even in Zhou Prison, such herbs would be very difficult to obtain. Fortunately, he knew of a place appropriately equipped for this task, and even more fortunately, it was the place he had intended to go to.

He walked through the cold, wet, and extremely long tunnels,

taking many turns. The ground was no longer flat, but gradually inclined upward. He continued forward, walking to the end of the tunnel. His hands accurately inserted themselves into a gap in the wall, removing an array. He activated a switch, and then his hands pushed forward, opening a door and delivering him from darkness.

A dazzling sunlight was waiting for him, and also a moving face as warm and gentle as the sunshine.

The sunlight came from the sky above the courtyard. The gloomy clouds of snow had at some point been blown away, revealing the porcelain-blue sky. Just like this, the warm light of the winter sun appeared before him. The warm and moving face belonged to a beautiful young woman.

Upon seeing this sunlight and the face of this young woman, Zhou Tong instantly felt his body warm up and his mind calm down. Moreover, the concern and anxiety evident on the woman's face made his chest turn hot. This was an emotion completely different from fear or loathing, and it was also the emotion that he most lacked and most required in his life.

The young woman supported him out of the tunnel and then closed it with great difficulty, once more activating the switch.

This courtyard was not very large, nor very refined, but every detail, whether it was the black eaves, the screen wall, or the border of green bamboo, brimmed with the word 'tranquility'.

When Zhou Tong first designed this courtyard, this was what he had pursued. He had always believed that only with tranquility did a place carry the flavor of home.

This courtyard was his home, his true home, the final place that he could serenely rest his exhausted body and poison-steeped heart.

Only after returning to this courtyard could his mind finally gain true calm, could it truly relax.

For his safety and to protect his secret, so that his hard-sought tranquility could not be disturbed, Zhou Tong had set up with this courtyard with extreme prudence.

Nobody knew of this place, not his most loyal subordinates in the Department for Purging Officials, Cheng Jun and the other Eight Tigers, or even the Divine Empress.

The only person that knew of this courtyard's relationship to him was already dead.

Every time he returned to this courtyard and he listened to the sounds beyond the patches of green bamboo from their neighboring courtyard, Zhou Tong would always recall a certain memory.

In these past few years, Xue Xingchuan had dearly hoped that Zhou Tong would treat the Xue Estate as his true home, but how

could this be possible? Disregarding how every one of the servants and his juniors in the Xue Estate would view him with dismay and unease, he refused to do so solely because of his surname. His elder brother might not want this surname, but he did.

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Along with the Demon Commander, Zhou Tong was probably the person that the greatest number of people wished to see dead. Perhaps for this reason, what he feared most was death. Besides this courtyard, he had a few more secret hiding places in the capital. However, none of those places was as safe as this or as important or comfortable.

He felt this way because this courtyard had a sweet-tempered and moving woman who also had heartfelt love and respect for him. More importantly, there were many precious things stored, like several extremely rare herbs. Of these herbs, the majority had been obtained via sending people to remove them from the Hundred Herb Garden, and another portion had been gifted to him by the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets.

He took a steaming towel and placed it over his face. He began to heavily cough, perhaps incited by the hot air.

Upon taking off the towel, he saw that its surface was now spotted with blots of black blood. They looked like flowers drawn in ink, completely unreal yet somewhat horrifying.

The woman was very anxious, but Zhou Tong seemed particularly calm and indifferent. He had her grind some ink while he sat on a chair, closing his eyes to calm his mind, but looking like he was tasting something.

He was tasting that fierce poison in his body carrying the flavor of the vast plains.

After some time, he opened his eyes. Supported by the woman, he walked to a table by the window. He lifted the brush and wrote with confidence and ease, as if he was writing calligraphy.

The strokes on the paper were dripping with ink, and the handwriting was extremely clear. This was not [grass script](#), but a prescription of herbs.

Which herbs to use, how many bowls of water, how to simmer it, what sort of fire, what sort of stove, what sort of coal, what sort of water, how to filter the medicinal broth, when to add crystals—everything was written with remarkable clarity.

The woman saw his expression and knew that he should be okay for the moment. Her mind relaxed, she took the prescription and went to the kitchen to make the medicine.

This sort of matter had happened several times, so she had some experience.

No mistakes were made with regards to the types and amount of herbs used, and she very smoothly heated the stove.

At some point, a beauty dressed in palace attire appeared by the stove. The fire shone upon her face, illuminating her sublime appearance.

This palace beauty was truly very beautiful.

In fact, in the past few years, she had been regarded as the most beautiful woman in all of the Great Zhou Dynasty.

The servant woman brewed the medicine with a calm expression, dividing the herbs and filtering their juices with great steadiness. It was like she didn't even see this beauty dressed in palace attire.

The beauty placed a few things in the medicine pot.

The servant woman still acted as if she did not see.

The room was silent, the only sound the gurgling of the broth in the medicine pot.

(TN: Grass script is a type of calligraphy style.)

Chapter 719 – The Person in the World Who Understands You the Most Has Come

The palace beauty walked to the window, silently gazing at the courtyard basking in sunlight.

The sunlight shone upon her face, yet it was unable to bring too much warmth. A haggard and cold aura continuously lurked behind this beautiful face, impossible to get rid of.

The kitchen was very quiet, the sight within extraordinarily strange, persisting and fermenting under the sunlight.

After some time, the medicine was ready. The woman carried the medicine pot into a prepared jar of ice water and waited for the medicinal broth to cool.

Just like Zhou Tong, the palace beauty was also skilled in mental techniques. It was highly likely that the woman could not see the beauty by the window because her senses had been confused by an illusion.

Ultimately, the woman still raised her head to glance at her, proving that none of this was delusion, all of it was real.

The palace beauty leaned on the window and lightly waved her hand, indicating that all should proceed as normal.

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The medicinal broth could not be completely cooled before drinking, as this would harm its effectiveness. The bowl of broth brought before Zhou Tong was still exuding a thick cloud of steam.

Zhou Tong was somewhat enchanted by the heat carried by this steam, as this sort of feeling filled him with energy. However, when he drained all the medicinal broth in the bowl, he felt somewhat dissatisfied, as the broth had scalded the roof his mouth and his gums. He did not blame the woman, but rather was dissatisfied at his own attitude: he had been in too much of a rush.

Though no blisters had arisen from this scalding, it still felt rather uncomfortable, so he used his tongue to lick at it.

His tongue sent back a slightly sweet feeling, somewhat akin to the taste of rust.

He knew that this was the taste of blood and couldn't help but frown a little. He took a mirror from the table and examined his mouth.

He didn't find anything too strange, only that the gums around his teeth were slightly swollen and bleeding.

The taste of blood gradually receded, leaving only the bitter

flavor of medicine. He took two sugar-coated peanuts from a dish on the table, threw them into his mouth, and began to assiduously chew on them.

Ever since he was very young, he was very afraid of drinking medicine. He found it too bitter, so each time he had to take medicine, he always prepared a few sweet snacks.

As he chewed on the sugar-coated peanuts, he thought about all that he had encountered today.

Xue He spent his entire year in the snowy plains of the north, leading the army, so it was to be expected that he could get his hands on this sort of poison, but how he had managed to poison him in the underground prison cell?

Had Xue He wanted to poison him to death to take vengeance for Xue Xingchuan and make the world feel that this was an appropriate retribution delivered by the cycle of the Heavenly Dao?

The problem was that poisoning him to death was no easy task.

A cold smile floated on Zhou Tong's lips, a sense of pride appearing in his dark and frigid eyes.

Sugar-coated peanuts were delicious, their only downside being that they somewhat clung to his teeth. He took out an exquisitely crafted silver toothpick, picking at his teeth while he continued to

ponder his worries.

Xue He had probably already escaped Zhou Prison, but that did not matter. Although the world was vast, there was no place that could hold the people of the Xue clan now.

Zhou Tong gazed out the window at the neighboring courtyard, thinking to himself, after this matter is settled, I'll catch Xue He as quickly as possible and poison him to death, poison him very, very slowly.

He had already thought of which poisons could make Xue He die in the slowest and most painful fashion.

A soft crack came from his mouth, snapping this extremely tangential and delightful train of thought.

One of his teeth had snapped off at the root. It lay quietly in his palm, its snapped end stained in blood, a most sinister sight.

As he stared at this tooth, Zhou Tong felt his just-warmed body turn cold once more.

He silently thought for a few moments, then looked at himself in the mirror again.

This sight frightened him out of his wits.

His gums were already purple and black, his teeth incredibly loose, liable to drop off at the slightest gust of wind.

His teeth were sending an ever clearer and ever more unendurable pain, causing his body to tremble once more.

He had only wanted to scrape the sugar from between his teeth, yet he ended up prying out a tooth.

The point of the exquisite silver toothpick was already a ghastly black like coal.

This is all an illusion, he said to himself.

He had far too much experience in the use of poisons, so he believed that there was no flaw in his judgment. Although his method of detoxification might not have completely cleansed his body of the poison, it could not at least have failed to halt its progress. He would then have much more time to slowly resolve it.

But why was it that after he had drunk the medicine, not only had the poison in his body not come under control, it had become even more terrifying, already affecting his teeth?

Zhou Tong could not understand and fell into a prolonged silence.

Even now, he did not think that there was something wrong with the medicine, that something might have happened as it was being

brewed.

He never once doubted the woman.

He took out two precious pills and swallowed them, temporarily preventing the poison from breaking out.

He was somewhat dazed, his vision blurry.

If his vision was not blurry, how could he be seeing the woman walk to the gate of the small courtyard?

A bundle wrapped with a flowery blue cloth was in the woman's arm.

It was a very small and simple bundle, unable to hold too much.

Yes, of course, he had bought so many expensive things for her in these past few years; how could such a small bundle suffice to take it all away?

So she could not be intending to leave, she could not be intending to abandon him, she could not be the problem, she could not have poisoned him.

So his vision was truly getting blurry, this poison was far too strong—he was even starting to see things.

Zhou Tong said all this to himself, and then stood up from the chair.

The distance between the house and the main gate was ten-some zhang, the courtyard in between filled with sunlight.

Separated by a ground awash with sunlight, he and the woman looked across at each other.

The woman's expression was calm, warm, and serene. She slightly bowed, just as she did every time he said farewell, only today she was the one saying farewell.

It turned out that none of it had been an illusion.

Why? Zhou Tong did not ask, because he clearly knew that there were numberless reasons, but since he had not realized before, there was no need to know it now.

The cruelest thing in the world was when you didn't want to know the answer and someone insisted on telling you the answer.

"She doesn't like you. She has never liked you."

The palace beauty walked to the door and said to him, "She was only afraid of you, so she did not dare leave."

Why was she not afraid today? Naturally, because he was going

to die.

Zhou Tong was not shocked at her appearance.

In reality, he now completely understood why the medicine he had taken had been of no use: someone had put another poison in the medicine.

Upon understanding this fact, he knew that someone had come to this courtyard, and he even knew who this person was.

The person who understood you the most was naturally not a relative, or else Xue Xingchuan would not have died so miserably and then almost had his corpse exposed in the plains after his death.

And the person who understood you the most was also not necessarily, as often written in books, your enemy, because you would always have some wariness towards your enemy and develop many safeguards against him.

The person who understood you the most was also not necessarily your friend. To be friends until your hair turned white was a beautiful thing, but you would spend too little time with each other, the distance between your two cities would be too far. When you met, you would always drink wine while recalling old times, speculating on the future, cursing your past teachers or the current government. There were few opportunities to chat about more in-depth things.

So the person who understood you the most was often your partner at work.

With year after year, day after day of working together, it would be very difficult to not understand each other. You would drink together many times, chatting about many in-depth things, and for the sake of both open and hidden competitions, you would remember all these things with remarkable clarity, preparing to use them at any point in the future. For instance, he might learn which restaurant is your favorite for buying box lunches and you might learn which restaurant has his favorite noodles. He might learn which group leader you hate the most and you might learn which TV channel is his favorite. He might know of all the girlfriends you've talked about in the past few years while you would know how many people he's been cheating on in the past few months. On the morning after Christmas Eve, the two of you might even come out of the same pub and then smile at each other, because this pub was the place where the company could negotiate the best discount.

Logically speaking, Zhou Tong had no partners at work, as the Department for Purging Officials was a very special government office, under the direct management of the Divine Empress, not requiring interaction with anyone from the Imperial Court. Cheng Jun, the other Eight Tigers, and the redcoated cavalry were all Zhou Tong's subordinates. However, there were also rather special existences in this world, like this palace beauty.

The Tianhai Divine Empress had relied on Xue Xingchuan, Tian Chui, Xu Shiji, and other such Divine Generals to control the Great Zhou Army. To control the Imperial Court and thus reign over the millions and millions of people of the Great Zhou, she had relied

primarily on two people. The first was Zhou Tong, and the other was naturally Mo Yu.

They were the Tianhai Divine Empress's left and right arms in the Imperial Court and were often privately reprimanded as villains colluding together. They had cooperated for many years, and although it could not be said that their hearts were connected, they did possess a tacit understanding. Whether it was confronting the Tianhai clan or going against the powerful will of the military, this tacit understanding had always displayed a very positive use.

This tacit understanding meant that the two of them had a deep understanding of each other.

Zhou Tong knew of that rebellious heart and unwillingness in the deepest depths of Mo Yu's soul, and even had a vague idea of her thoughts about a certain person. Mo Yu knew of Zhou Tong's well-concealed fear of the Divine Empress and also of that small courtyard basking in the sunlight. Thus, she had sought out this place today and delivered unto him a most fatal strike.

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Upon seeing Mo Yu come in through the door, Zhou Tong quickly calmed down, faster than he had imagined. In the days after the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, he had ordered the Department for Purging Officials to constantly trace and confirm her whereabouts in the south. Perhaps because of this, he had long

since mentally prepared himself to see her in the capital.

He said to Mo Yu, "I knew that you would come back to the capital, but I didn't expect it to be now."

Mo Yu asked, "Why?"

Zhou Tong explained, "Since you clearly understand that if you come back to the capital, your death is assured."

Mo Yu stared at him and said, "I really don't care much about that, as long as you can die before me."

Zhou Tong was unaware that Chen Changsheng had said something similar not too long ago.

He looked at Mo Yu and asked, "You've returned to take vengeance for the Empress?"

"I don't have the ability, nor are you my foe. You are not worthy of that right."

In Mo Yu's view, he was a dog raised by the Empress. "I have come to punish the Empress's dog in her place."

After a pause, Zhou Tong asked, "How are you prepared to punish this dog?"

Mo Yu proposed, "Stew it in a pot? I think that's not bad."

Zhou Tong said very seriously to her, "You don't have to be that hare."

"I don't mean '[cook the hounds after killing the hares](#)', I just don't have as much experience in torture as you, so I can only think about cooking you to death."

Mo Yu earnestly asked, "Do you have some other suggestion?"

(TN: 'Cook the hounds after killing the hares' is a Chinese idiom that originates from the Warring States period. Essentially, once you've hunted all the hares down, you kill the hounds and cook them. Similarly, you kill your trusted aides once they've outlived their usefulness.)

Chapter 720 – The Avenue of Blood (I)

"I have no suggestions, but I have an explanation."

Zhou Tong gasped for a few breaths of air, then continued, "My explanations have no meaning to anybody else, but I think that you are different. After all, both of our situations have been rather similar in these past few years. My so-called betrayal was out of fear and self-defense, while you have done many things for similar reasons."

This referred to how Mo Yu had kept the Divine Empress in the dark and obeyed the wishes of the Pope, secretly arranging for Chen Changsheng to enter the Orthodox Academy.

Mo Yu shook her head and refuted, "My fear and self-defense that arose from the world after the Empress have nothing to do with the Empress."

"No matter what you say, in my view, since the Empress had never once cared about our eventual fates, why did we have to live for her sake? On that night, Chen Changsheng came to the alley of the Northern Military Department to kill me and I nearly died, but what did the Empress do?"

Zhou Tong jeered, "She simply didn't care about my circumstances, only about how she could acknowledge her son. It's pity that she went blind, even mistaking someone else for her own son."

As he sneered, his black and purple gums contrasting with his pale face presented a ghastly sight.

Mo Yu somewhat proudly said, "The Empress cared about me; she had me and Yourong leave the capital beforehand."

Zhou Tong fell silent for quite some time, then suddenly said, "You don't actually think that since you've poisoned me, you can just easily kill me?"

Mo Yu gave no explanation, only declared, "I will kill you."

"The greatest difficulty stands before you: you are simply too young."

Zhou Tong expounded, "To be young means that you have not accumulated enough years. No matter how talented you are, there isn't enough to bring your cultivation level too high. Moreover, your patience is poor. You should have appeared a bit later, letting the poison in my body dig deeper. In addition, you should not have chosen this place. This place is my home, and to kill someone in their home is always a more challenging task."

To the vast majority of people, their home was the place they were most familiar with, their final fort, their true home court.

Zhou Tong had placed all his treasures and his most precious serenity in this small courtyard, so he had naturally made the appropriate arrangements, installing all sorts of mechanisms and

arrays here.

As he spoke, the sounds of many gears springing into action could be heard from outside the window. The sunlight coming in from the sky well dimmed as the energies from several powerful arrays sprang from the earth.

Those two precious pills had already been digested into their essence in his stomach. Their medicinal power circulated throughout his body along his meridians and temporarily restrained any further corrosion from the poison, allowing him to gain back a portion of his strength.

The sun in the sky brought no real warmth, and the gentle breeze was somewhat chilly. Together with the arrays, a stench of blood enveloped the courtyard.

Without hesitation, he used his Great Crimson Gown technique. If someone were to observe this sight with their spiritual sense, they would discover that this courtyard was already immersed in a sea of blood.

The Great Crimson Gown was his most powerful technique and had correspondingly vicious demands on his spiritual sense and true essence. Given that he now had two fierce poisons coursing through his body, he was even less able to keep up the technique for long. However, Mo Yu could also not remain in this sea of blood. If she did not want to die together with Zhou Tong, she would have to retreat for a moment.

He just needed to take the chance offered by her temporary retreat to escape this courtyard. As long as he could get to the street, he could preserve his life.

This was the most effective method Zhou Tong had come up with as the shadow of death lingered over him.

The small courtyard seemed very ordinary, but the street on which it sat was home to many extraordinary figures of great importance. This had been one of his considerations when he first chose this place.

What happened next exceeded Zhou Tong's expectations. To be more precise, it exceeded his understanding and knowledge of Mo Yu.

Mo Yu did not leave. She stood next to the door, letting the invisible sea of blood paint her palace dress a most frightening color.

She was very calm and focused, the exhaustion on her face completely supplanted by a deathly stillness.

Starlight twinkled in her dress, penetrating through the blood in a beautiful spectacle.

A slender sword, outwardly delicate yet containing the tribulations of time, pierced through the sea of blood, a condensed stream of starlight.

With a squelch, this delicate sword pierced through Zhou Tong's belly, the edge poking out from his waist, dyed with black blood.

Zhou Tong did not give a wretched yowl or painful howl, only stared at her, his face brimming with incredulous shock.

Mo Yu's sword had pierced through his body.

His sea of blood had also swallowed Mo Yu's spiritual sense.

Let alone the fact that Mo Yu was only at the middle level of Star Condensation, even if she suddenly broke through into the peak of Star Condensation, she still would not be able to leave this sea of blood and this courtyard.

To put it another way, her death was assured.

Why? Zhou Tong very quickly understood: she had never planned on surviving.

He had wanted to use the threat of bringing her down with him to make her retreat, but that was what she had intended in the first place.

Her return to the capital had always been a path to death; she just wanted to bring him along.

Whether they were falling into an abyss or entering the sea of stars, she wanted to bring him along and bring him before the Divine Empress.

Zhou Tong's face became exceptionally pale.

He did not want to die together with her.

This courtyard was still under his control; there were still mechanisms and arrays that he had not activated. He still wanted to put up one last struggle.

However, he did not succeed. His failure was not because of the sword running through his body, but because his body had turned stiff.

A pair of hands fell on his shoulders.

These hands were thin and withered like tree branches. They were white as if they had not seen sunlight for many days. The nails were pointed, long, sharp, and covered in dirt.

It was a pair of wolf claws, their sharp nails digging deep under Zhou Tong's shoulder bones, stabbing holes through which black blood surged out.

Zhou Tong knew that his injuries were about to get even worse. His shoulder bones were already showing signs of cracking.

His body felt an absolute cold, a horrifying fear. He did not dare turn his head to look.

He had already guessed the identity of that person who had appeared behind him as noiselessly as a ghost.

He had seen the cases concerning the people that this person had killed on the snowy plains. He knew that if he turned his head, this person would absolutely bite through his neck.

At the border of life and death, Zhou Tong no longer cared about those two poisons in his body, and squeezed out every last drop of his true essence.

A massive wave rose up in the sea of blood that enveloped the room.

With a howl, he transformed into a bloody streak of light that charged out the door.

With a crack, the delicate sword stabbed through his body was snapped in half by his charge.

That ghostly person behind him had no time to break his neck. There was only the sound of several tears as several gouts of blood shot into the air.

Countless mechanisms activated at once and several arrays displayed their final use, exploding like fireworks. The fake mountains and screen wall of the courtyard were knocked over, followed closely by the house itself. Dust filled the air, the green bamboo became kindling, the flagstones shattered, and even the sunlight seemed to shatter.

Zhou Tong lay collapsed in the remnants of the bamboo.

He immediately pushed at a fake bamboo shoot, causing what remained of the wall to collapse.

He was pushed out of the courtyard by a wave of Qi and heavily fell onto the snow.

His blood-drenched body against the pure white snow produced no beautiful sight, nor did it imbue him with a sense of heroism.

His blood was black and infused with an awful stench as it flowed out of the wound in his belly.

His back was a wretched sight, with his clothes in tatters, his flesh mangled, and ten scratches so deep that one could see bone.

Zhou Tong had lived many years and this was his most miserable hour.

But his eyes brimming with fear and pain finally saw some hope, causing him to feel ecstasy.

He had finally reached the street.

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Dust filled the air and stone shards flew everywhere. In a very short amount of time, this small courtyard had become a ruin.

Mo Yu was not surprised by this. She knew that a person like Zhou Tong would assuredly cause a massive ruckus before he died, and this place truly had been his home court. What somewhat surprised her was that there was actually someone able to follow Zhou Tong through the tunnels. Even though she had a detailed map of the tunnels of Zhou Prison, she had never thought about going down there. However, when she saw that this person was Zhexiu, the unexpected became the expected. She knew that this wolf cub was an expert at tracking and concealing, followed by murder.

She and Zhexiu exchanged glances, then walked out of the courtyard. They were both injured, but not too seriously.

Zhou Tong's cultivation level was much higher than Mo Yu's and Zhexiu's. Under normal circumstances, even Mo Yu and Zhexiu together might not have stood a chance.

Mo Yu and Zhexiu were the two people in the world who most

wanted Zhou Tong dead, and so they had made ample preparations. Without even speaking with each other, they had both chosen to use poison.

Even under these circumstances, Zhou Tong had survived and escaped the courtyard.

But Mo Yu and Zhexiu were in no rush. Zhou Tong was barely alive and his death was not far.

By the time they walked onto the street, Zhou Tong was just a little way ahead of them.

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Zhou Tong had already become a person of blood. Let alone using a movement technique to charge forward, he couldn't even walk very fast, and staggered to and fro as he forged ahead.

Blood constantly dripped onto the snow, its shade so dark as to seem like ink.

Zhexiu had vanished, but the shadows of the street seemed to slightly deform.

Mo Yu arrived behind him, her hair a little disorderly, brushing

against her slightly pale face.

She said nothing, but gazed expressionlessly at his back.

She had returned to the capital for the exact purpose of dying together with Zhou Tong. She had not expected to be alive right now.

She did not care if anyone else discovered that she had returned to the capital, did not care if anyone saw.

Zhou Tong knew that she had come, and put his all into walking faster, yet it was impossible.

The snowy street was very quiet, the only sound his panting gasps.

Mo Yu gripped her broken sword and slashed down.

With a plop, Zhou Tong fell to the snow, a wound on his left thigh.

He still did not turn his head. Gasping, he struggled up and continued forward.

On the side of the street was an estate with a cinnabar gate. Sticking up from the corner of the wall was a white banner, somewhat tattered.

With a creak, the gate of this estate opened and a person walked out.

Zhou Tong knew who this estate belonged to. His bloodstained face displayed no change in emotion as he continued forward.

With another flashing sword glow, another wound appeared on his body, and he fell once more into the snow.

A cry of shock rose from the stone steps.

Zhou Tong lay collapsed in the snow, painfully coughing, blood flying everywhere.

After some time, he dragged himself up once more, an anguished wail of some beast bursting from his lips.

Mo Yu was right behind him, hand wielding sword, sword covered in his blood.

He did not turn around, only looked forward, hurriedly and painfully gasping.

The snowy street ahead was deserted, with not a single person in sight, so where did he want to go?

Chapter 721 – The Avenue of Blood (II)

In the northern section of the capital was a long avenue called the Road of Peace, a street very close to the Imperial City. Upon crossing the nearby Sanshe Bridge, one would step upon Vermillion Bird Avenue, making it very convenient to reach the Imperial Court. Over the countless years, this street had always been home to high officials and nobles, and from the previous dynasty until now, nothing had ever changed this fact. All that happened was that the inhabitants of the residences and estates lining this street would constantly change as the situation changed.

In the Zhengtong era, the vast estate that was the closest to the Imperial City and had the best location on the Road of Peace naturally belonged to the Tianhai clan. After the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, the Tianhai clan remained in its same spot, but several lots to the east, many courtyards changed masters, undergoing massive renovations. This was because the Prince of Xiang, the Prince of Zhongshan, and the other ten-some princes of the Chen clan had begun to move in.

The easternmost estate on the Road of Peace, and also the one closest to the blooms of the scholar trees, was the Xue Estate. As the Tianhai Divine Empress's most trusted individual in the Great Zhou Army, Xue Xingchuan had naturally had the right to enjoy such treatment. Now, the Xue clan could not possibly continue holding this estate. Some prince or Divine General might become the new master, but who could know?

Madam Xue also did not know who the new master of this estate would be, but she knew that this matter could not be prevented.

She had never held any sort of extravagant hope of remaining in this place and had made the corresponding preparations long ago. The servants had all been dismissed, and after the funeral concluded, she used silver from her dowry to buy a small courtyard on the street right outside Hundred Flowers Lane.

After doing all this, she thought that she could finally calm down, but upon hearing the sobbing at her side, she realized that calming down was also an extravagant hope. She felt an ache in her head as she harshly asked, "Are you crying because you're hurt, or are you crying because you're sad?"

The young lady of the Xue clan that had been driven out of the Assistant Minister's estate several days ago had been staying in the Xue Estate the entire time, her face drenched in tears. Today, after hearing the news, her weeping became inconsolable. Upon hearing Madam Xue's shouted question, she was frightened and timidly raised her head. Wiping her tears, she asked back, "Mother, what's wrong?"

Her eyes were bloodshot and her voice was somewhat hoarse. For some reason, her face was covered in wounds as if someone had beaten her.

Madam Xue pointed at her face, which even today was still bruised, and angrily said, "If you're crying out of pain, it means you haven't grown up and aren't acting like your father's daughter. If you're crying because he died, then it means that there's something wrong with your head. Is it worth it to cry over such a person?"

The news that the Assistant Minister Wei of the Ministry of Rites had been killed by Chen Changsheng and Wang Po had already spread to the entire capital. Every time the young lady thought of her husband's heartless and ruthless methods, she would lose herself in rage, wanting nothing more than for him to die. However, when she suddenly realized that he really was dead, she would think of the past and couldn't restrain the sorrow welling up within her, finding her fate to truly be bitter.

After hearing her mother's words, the young lady of the Xue clan also felt herself to be thoroughly useless, but...why had Principal Chen killed him? Shouldn't he have beaten the husband for a bit and then escorted him to the Xue Estate to beg for forgiveness, to swear an oath to the heavens that he would treat her very well, just as he had in the past...

An extremely unexpected howl disrupted her jumbled thoughts.

This howl came from the courtyard neighboring the Xue Estate.

It was followed by countless rumbling collisions, even the faint sounds of a thunderstorm. After all this, the courtyard collapsed and dust plumed into the air.

The young lady of the Xue clan was scared witless and her face paled, no longer in the mood for sorrow and tears.

Madam Xue looked at the dust rising from the neighboring courtyard, suspicion appearing on her face.

The collapse of the neighboring residence had not affected the Xue Estate, but she felt for some reason that the matter was related to the Xue Estate.

Many years ago, when the Divine Empress first gifted this estate on the Road of Peace to Xue Xingchuan, the residence adjacent also began undergoing renovations.

The gate of this courtyard opened south into the scholar tree blossoms such that normal people wouldn't realize it existed. Anyone walking down the Road of Peace would think it was a part of the Xue Estate.

The owner of this courtyard was very mysterious and had never interacted with anyone. Even today, Madam Xue did not know who the owner was, only had vague inklings that it had something to do with her own family. This was because she had once personally heard Xue Xingchuan give two orders regarding it, both times with the severest of warnings.

She had even once suspected that her enigmatic neighbor might be the rumored Crown Prince Zhaoming. Of course, later events proved this conjecture to be false.

The collapse of the residence had stirred up all sorts of dust. Broken shards of bamboo broke through a few green stalks of bamboo and fell into the Xue Estate's garden.

Madam Xue embraced her frightened daughter and whispered words of comfort to her.

The neighboring courtyard was still collapsing, still rumbling and booming. It seemed as if a person had fallen directly out of the courtyard onto the street. Madam Xue did not know why the neighboring residence had collapsed, but seeing the terrifying ruckus it created, she could only assume that even if that person had escaped, they had certainly been injured from the fall. She ordered the butler to open the gate and see if that person needed any help.

It was nearly twilight and so somewhat gloomy. Thankfully, the snow was so white that it was easy to see that person covered in blood.

Even if the blood that person bled was actually black.

The moment the butler pushed upon the gate, the first thing Madam Xue and her daughter saw was this gory sight.

The young lady cried out in alarm then said, "Quickly save him!"

After saying this, she saw a very bizarre sight.

A beauty dressed in palace attire appeared silently behind the bloody man.

This palace beauty was also bleeding and her appearance was rather dusty, obscuring a part of her face but failing to obscure her beauty.

Who was she? What was going on here? While the young lady of the Xue clan was in a daze, the palace beauty raised the broken sword in her hand and slashed down at the blood-covered man.

A spurt of blood shot onto the snow. It wasn't much, not enough to make the man die on the spot, but not so little that people could not see.

"Murder!" The young lady called out in fright, then her voice came to a sudden halt.

Madam Xue had covered her daughter's mouth, her hand shaking but forceful, not letting her daughter make one noise more.

She could clearly tell that this palace beauty was Mo Yu and that blood-covered man...was Zhou Tong.

It turned out that the neighboring courtyard was Zhou Tong's.

She finally understood, and when she thought about how Xue Xingchuan had concealed this matter from her, she grew even angrier, her body shaking even harder.

"It's Zhou Tong." Madam Xue's voice was somewhat indistinct and cold.

The young lady's body stiffened. As she stared at the bloody sight

before her, her hands slowly clenched.

Zhou Tong was like a beast injured to the point of death, releasing strange howls as he painfully clambered up from the snow and walked forward a few more steps.

He knew that this place was the Xue Estate, knew that the mother and daughter on the stone steps were his sister-in-law and his niece, so he did not turn his head to glance at them.

He would not plead to them, as that was seeking his own humiliation. He also did not wish for anyone else to see him acting like a stray dog.

He wanted to leave as quickly as possible, but it was just then that the shrill howl of a sword fell on the upper part of his left thigh.

His flesh was cut horizontally, blood slowly seeping out like porridge along the brim of the pot. He fell heavily to his knees, sending snow flying.

At this sight, the young lady of the Xue clan once more let out of a cry of alarm, but this time, besides fear, there was also much more pleasure.

Chapter 722 – The Avenue of Blood (III)

Beasts that had been injured to the point of death would make strange and low howls because they wanted to keep their voices in their throats for as long as possible, not wanting anyone else to hear their weakness. However, after having his thigh cut and collapsing in front of the Xue Estate's gate, Zhou Tong could finally longer restrain it and let loose a wretched howl of suffering.

This wretched howl obscured the young lady of the Xue clan's cry of alarm, but it was still so clear as to be heard by everyone present.

The young lady felt even more elated, and the Xue clan's butler was so excited that his entire body trembled.

Yet Madam Xue, the person who should reasonably have been expected to have the greatest reaction, was still able to keep her calm, quietly gazing at Zhou Tong's collapsed figure in the snow.

It was very quiet in front of the Xue Estate, the only sound being Zhou Tong's heavy gasps for breath.

After some time, Zhou Tong dragged himself up from the snow and continued to stagger his way down the street, leaving behind a few bloodstains.

Mo Yu walked in front of the stone steps and turned to give Madam Xue a nod of greeting.

In these past few years, she and Xue Xingchuan had been the two most popular figures of Tianhai's court, so the two naturally had interacted before.

Madam Xue very earnestly bowed to her, saying, "Thank you."

Mo Yu said nothing, only nodded her head before continuing after Zhou Tong.

Madam Xue gazed at the warm red, yet also gloomy, sky, thinking of that day. She silently gave thanks to Chen Changsheng, wherever he was.

With the end of Tianhai's government, her husband had transformed from a loyal minister of the Great Zhou Dynasty to a traitor, while Zhou Tong, who was clearly a traitor, had become a valued minister of the Great Zhou Dynasty.

There was no doubt that this was unjust, but in this world in which no one dared to pay homage to a traitor, who would demand justice for one?

On that day in the Orthodox Academy, she had said that she hated that Zhou Tong was not dead. She truly hated this fact, hated until she despaired, a hate that bored into her bones.

At the time, Chen Changsheng had not said anything or made any attempts to comfort, only quietly gazed at her.

When sending her off from the Orthodox Academy, he had requested that she not leave the capital.

This was a promise.

He would kill Zhou Tong and let her witness it.

So Madam Xue had not returned to her hometown, but remained in the capital.

She wanted to personally witness this sight.

Now, she had finally seen it.

From the time Xue Xingchuan was poisoned to death, to the exposure of his corpse, to his funeral, she very rarely shed tears.

But now, two streams of hot, even scalding, tears flowed down her face.

She took one final glance at Zhou Tong desperately pulling himself up from the snow in a struggle to live, then ordered her butler, "Close the gate."

The young lady was somewhat shocked. She clung at her mother's arm and said unwillingly, "Mother, I still want to look. I haven't looked enough."

To see an insufferably arrogant and extraordinarily powerful, even undefeatable foe transformed into a stray dog beaten black and blue, anyone would want to look, and anyone would never be able to see enough.

"Enough."

Madam Xue didn't know if she was speaking about this matter or speaking to her daughter, but she returned inside the estate regardless.

The gate slowly closed, blocking many matters and memories outside.

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The Road of Peace was covered in snow, the snow covered in blood.

More and more blood was trickling down Zhou Tong's body, even causing the poison to be greatly diluted, allowing the blood to regain some of its red hue.

More and more wounds were appearing on Zhou Tong's body, a dense patchwork crisscrossing his wretched self.

These wounds had been made with exquisite care, deep enough and placed at just the right spots to cause maximum pain, but not enough to end his life.

As she struck, Mo Yu showed no emotion on her beautiful face. Her utter apathy and her bloodstained dress made her seem like the attendant to the god of death.

A sword glow would occasionally illuminate the gloomy street.

Zhou Tong arduously pressed forward through the snow. It had already become impossible for him to stand straight, and he often had to use his hands and feet together to move just a little bit forward. He looked as if he could collapse at any time, and no longer was he able to stand. No longer could he suppress his pain and fear, maintain the silent bearing of an old wolf. With every sword glow, a howl of misery could be heard.

This was a most thorough humiliation and torture on the body and mind, a cruel punishment that seemed to have no end.

This had always been a death by a thousand cuts.

Anyone else, even someone with the most stalwart of wills, would probably have fallen apart by now. Even if they might not grovel at the feet of their enemy and plead for mercy, they would at least think of every possible method for committing suicide. But Zhou Tong did not, because he had tortured and humiliated far too many people throughout his life, inflicted far too many cruel

punishments on the innocent. He had seen the darkest and most painful sights of the mortal world, and he had knowledge of the true Netherworld. His heart was like a stone that had been steeped in poison for seventy thousand years, every scrap of moss growing upon it the embodiment of sin. Even if Mo Yu used the cruelest methods and caused both his body and soul to shudder, he would never surrender, whether to her or to fate. Before the shadow of death, he would never walk towards it on his own volition. On the contrary, he was like a beggar with an incomparable longing for the final victory.

As long as I can crawl my way out of this avenue flowing with blood, I will win.

He howled in pain and then said to himself.

The twilight deepened, transitioning into darkness. The starlight reflected by the snow on the Road of Peace was not enough to illuminate this world.

For some reason, a sudden dusky light fell on Zhou Tong's body, revealing his terrifying wounds and exposed bones.

The distant lantern light gave off no warmth, yet Zhou Tong suddenly felt his body warm up. In the small courtyard, his vision had been severely damaged. All was blurry, so he could only get a general impression. However, he was very sure that this light came from his right-hand side, the north side of the Road of Peace.

This had been the estate of Imperial Tutor Cheng before he had

retired. Recently, a powerful prince had taken it, making this place a princely estate.

He had taken about a quarter of an hour, suffering the pain of death by a thousand cuts, to crawl twenty-some zhang. Finally, he had left the boundaries of the Xue Estate and reached this place.

He had patiently endured because he had hope. From the very beginning, his hope was this place.

His vision was still blurry, but his eyes brightened as if ignited by that lantern.

He still had some true essence, concealed in the deepest parts of his meridians. No matter how sharp Mo Yu's sword or how vicious her methods, he had never used it, because it was not a sufficient amount to help him escape his despairing situation.

Now, this dew-like true essence began to ignite, causing his body to lunge from the snow towards that light!

He lunged in front of the princely estate, now completely powerless, and crashed beneath the stone steps.

"I am Zhou Tong! Prince of Zhongshan, save me!"

He used his final dregs of strength to shout.

He had never once despaired. Over the numberless years, he had played with the hearts of thousands in his palm, so he was well aware that neither Mo Yu nor Zhexiu would let him die on the spot, especially when they had complete control over the situation. If they did so, they could not vent that brutality and desire for vengeance that was kept at the bottom of every person's heart.

This was his chance, and he had to seize it.

He thought angrily and scornfully, even if you princes want to pretend that you can't hear my wretched howls, can you possibly say that you couldn't hear my cries for help? It wasn't very difficult for him to speak a single word, but he had not simply said 'save me'. He had specifically called for a prince to save him, and even called out this prince's title. All this was so that the prince was forced to step out.

I am Zhou Tong, Minister of the Great Zhou Dynasty!

I am about to be killed!

Prince of Zhongshan, please save me!

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At some point, the clouds in the sky had gathered together, obscuring the stars and dropping snow onto the earth.

The gate to the Prince of Zhongshan's estate opened, as did many other gates on both sides of the Road of Peace. The light of many lanterns appeared in the darkness, bright and somewhat dazzling.

The dark avenue transformed into a river of silver.

In this river, Zhou Tong could no longer restrain his emotions, and his face reveled in the light as he crazily laughed.

With howls of wind, several dozen experts belong to these princely estates appeared on the street.

Mo Yu walked out of the drizzling snow, several zhang away from Zhou Tong.

Zhou Tong looked at her, his bloodstained face revealing a cruel and harsh expression.

How can you kill me now? Now it's time for someone else to kill you.

His eyes communicated his thoughts with extreme clarity.

Mo Yu did not even glance at him.

The wind blew against her palace dress, and snow fell upon her temples.

She surveyed the brightly lit Road of Peace, surveyed these ten-some princely estates, then said, "The Empress inflicted all sort of ills against you, but all of you received at least one favor."

These words were meant for those princes who still had yet to appear.

"The sons of Emperor Xian are all still alive."

The lanterns shone upon her face, increasing its beauty.

Yet her expression was still cold and her appearance completely unyielding, faintly similar to that deceased individual.

"Not one was left out; you are all still alive.

"It was the Empress who let all of you live until tonight.

"Tonight, I am asking for all of you to return this favor.

"I want him to die."

The snow silently drifted down, as quiet as this avenue.

After some time, someone waved their hand in the light.

Zhou Tong's vision was blurry, so he could not see this person's appearance, only that this person was dressed in a bright yellow gown.

The gate to the Prince of Zhongshan's estate did not close, but everyone that had emerged from the estate retreated back.

What was going on here?

Zhou Tong felt this to be absurd, as he thought, are none of you afraid of angering the venerable master of the Dao?

Mo Yu walked behind him.

Fear once more enveloped his body.

He panted for breath and crawled forward.

There were ten-some princely estates on the Road of Peace, and also the Tianhai clan, and also many ministers. The Prince of Zhongshan was crazy, but could everyone else be crazy?

He crawled, and crawled, and crawled ever forward, wanting to crawl to a place where the lantern light was fading.

But when he was still very far away, this lantern was extinguished.

And that princely estate even closed its gate.

Boom after boom resounded through the street as gate after gate closed, as lantern after lantern was extinguished.

The darkness grew deeper and deeper.

Zhou Tong grew colder and colder.

He crawled across the frigid snow, the bloodstained avenue. All his silence and perseverance had arisen from his hope, but now it had finally become...despair.

Chapter 723 – The Imperial Decree Arrives in the Snow

Zhou Tong crawled and struggled his way through the snow, the coughs from his throat ultimately transforming into a sobbing cry.

"Save me...somebody save me..."

His earlier cries of misery and lamentation had truthfully been somewhat faked. However, as he moved from the underground Zhou Prison to the small courtyard which basked in sunlight and then to the avenue covered in cold snow, he had been constantly escaping, constantly pursuing hope, yet he was disappointed again and again. Finally, he began to feel despair, his will collapsing like a flood bursting through a dam.

He sobbed in pain, his tears washing away some of the blood on his face before being frozen by the cold wind into an unsightly paste on his face.

His sobs were as unpleasant to hear as the screeching of an owl.

As an official most renowned for his cruelty, Zhou Tong had never once pardoned this world, never once felt a shred of kindness for it, never saved this world even a single time. Thus, this world naturally treated him with absolute cold. It would not pardon him, would not save him. The lights of the Road of Peace gradually faded into the distance and his path forward was plunged into darkness.

Some estates had still left their gates open, the closest one being the Prince of Zhongshan's estate. In the brightly lit depths of the princely estate, the Prince of Zhongshan sat on a chair with a frozen pear in his hand. As he recalled Zhou Tong's miserable appearance outside his gate, he felt incredibly happy, and even the frozen pear tasted sweeter.

A subordinate at his side hesitated for a while before saying, "This subordinate still feels this to be inappropriate."

"What's inappropriate? I've long wanted to tear that old dog into shreds."

After a pause, the Prince of Zhongshan added, "And what Mo Yu said was reasonable. Whether there was affection there or not, that I was able to survive until today could only be a kindness."

This subordinate was flabbergasted. He had not expected for the prince to truly be moved by Mo Yu's words.

It must be known that of the princes that had been living in the provinces and counties in the past few years, the one who lived the most miserable of circumstances was the Prince of Zhongshan. When compared to those princes of the other branch of the family that had been cruelly poisoned to death, he truly had survived, but he had been forced to eat shit and feign insanity...an even more horrifying fate than death.

"Does shit taste good? Of course not, but did you ever think, that

woman back there was able to force me to eat shit; are you saying that she couldn't tell I was just feigning insanity?"

The Prince of Zhongshan expressionlessly said, "She naturally knew that I was just pretending, but she did not expose me because she liked seeing me eat shit. But at the very least, she did not have me die, and compared to death, what does eating shit count for? As descendants of the Son of Heaven, which one of us isn't capable of eating shit?"

Each of the ten-some princely estates had their different reasons for closing their gates and shutting Zhou Tong out.

The most honest and cowardly of them all, the Prince of Louyang, was buried beneath three layers of blankets, on one side worried for his acquaintance Mo Yu's safety and on the other side silently cursing Zhou Tong.

As for the most experienced and knowledgeable prince, the most powerful Prince of Xiang, he wasn't even at home today.

The gate to the Prince of Xiang's estate was open, the young Prince Chen Liu standing in the light. His expression was calm with a tinge of anxiety.

Zhou Tong crawled past him and Mo Yu followed.

Prince Chen Liu ignored Zhou Tong and said to Mo Yu, "It's just about enough."

Mo Yu ignored him and continued to wield her sword as a whip, driving the blood-covered Zhou Tong forward.

At the end of the Road of Peace was a vast estate, decorated with particular care and luxury. Even the newly renovated estate of the Prince of Xiang could not match it.

This place was the home of the Tianhai clan, the most powerful clan on the continent in these past two centuries. The powerful figures of the Tianhai clan, such as Tianhai Chenwu and the other elders, would naturally not remain in the capital tonight for such a sensitive moment and had long since left for the manor on the outskirts.

The gate was still open and brightly lit. Tianhai Shengxue stood under the light, wearing clothes whiter than snow.

Zhou Tong crawled past the gate, shooting a glance, his eyes filled with bitter resentment. However, he could not plead for rescue or curse. He no longer had the strength to speak.

A laugh like silver bells rang out, then gradually devolved into weeping.

The Princess of Ping was standing behind Tianhai Shengxue.

After the palace coup, she had been brought back to the Tianhai clan. It was said that after a time, she might be married off to

Prince Chen Liu.

As she stared at Zhou Tong struggling through the snow, she gave a somewhat insane smile, her beautiful face covered in tears.

"You look a lot like a dog today!"

She called out to Zhou Tong, her words like a curse.

Tianhai Shengxue did not stop her, only held her shoulder to stop her from impulsively attacking Zhou Tong.

He looked at the blood-covered Mo Yu and very solemnly said, "It's just about enough."

His meaning was the same as Prince Chen Liu's.

Mo Yu was someone that the Imperial Court had to arrest, the number one person on their most wanted list.

Mo Yu still said nothing. When she returned to the capital, she had never had any intention of leaving alive.

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Zhou Tong's mind was a blur; even despair and anger had already receded. At this final moment, there was only a question.

Why is no one coming to save me? Principal Shang only needs to move a finger and I'll live, so why do I have to die?

Just like those massive beasts living on the snowy plains of the north, as he sensed his impending death, he subconsciously went to the place he was most familiar with to wait for death to fall.

To Zhou Tong, the place he was most familiar with was naturally that small courtyard in the alley of the Northern Military Department, so he headed in that direction.

That place was actually very close to the Road of Peace. It was for this reason that he had been able to bring his subordinates to the Xue Estate so quickly when the funeral was being held.

However, when crawling across the icy street, this distance would become extremely long, and that was also with the occasional flashing of a sword glow behind him.

Mo Yu was still occasionally brandishing her sword. Every time it fell, it would cut away a piece of Zhou Tong's flesh.

Zhou Tong's blood had nearly run out, his howls of pain growing weaker and weaker until they dwindled into nothingness. Just like some insensible man of wood, he continued to crawl across the snow.

A crowd of spectators had appeared on both sides of the street. As they watched the blood-covered Zhou Tong being constantly hacked at and humiliated, their initial shock transformed into a sublime happiness. Every time Mo Yu slashed her sword down and cut away a piece of flesh, the crowd would cheer.

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Snow was still falling from the sky, but in the sky to the west, stars could be seen.

The ground of the courtyard within the alley of the Northern Military Department had been destroyed, slashed into countless pieces by the hacking and slashing of many, many swords.

Zhou Prison was truly destroyed. The buildings and the prison on the surface, and even those cells hidden deep below, were all revealed.

Those torture tools covered in blood and human flesh, those severed limbs and corpses, came together to form a scene of purgatory on earth.

Xue He had opened the doors of all the cells, and so those prisoners with lighter injuries had already fled. Only those with heavy injuries who teetered on the verge of death remained.

Those prisoners who had endured countless tortures were the most direct proof of this Netherworld brought into the mortal world.

The starlight spilled over Zhou Prison, its holy and beautiful light starkly contrasting against the nauseating sight of blood and filth.

A deathly stillness.

Xiao De and the experts of the army had killed more people than they could count, and the assassins of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets were all extremely sinister individuals, yet none of them had ever seen such a miserable sight. Even the officials of the Department for Purging Officials found themselves rather disgusted by those blood-drenched rooms and grotesquely-shaped torture instruments, even though they had seen them many times and personally carried out those tortures.

Perhaps it was because this gory and nauseating sight had never been exposed to the light of day.

Zhou Tong's tracks could not be found.

All sorts of noises were coming from outside the courtyard, but there was a strange sense of silence hanging about.

Chen Changsheng was covered in blood, perhaps his or that of others.

He walked out of the courtyard. All of his swords had already returned to the sheath, but nobody stopped him.

The street was crowded with people, a dense mass except for one vacant space in the middle.

Zhou Tong lay on the snow, gasping his final breaths. His body was covered in wounds too numerous to count. It would not be wrong to say that he had been hacked into pieces.

Chen Changsheng walked up to him.

With great difficulty, Zhou Tong raised his head to glance at him. Surprisingly, he was able to recognize Chen Changsheng, and one final hope bloomed within his heart.

In his view, Chen Changsheng assuredly loathed him, as why else would Chen Changsheng be thinking every moment about killing him?

He was not afraid that Chen Changsheng hated him, only that Chen Changsheng did not hate enough.

He firmly believed that he had an extremely deep understanding of the human mind. The more one loathed, the less one was willing for their enemy to die.

Come, cut at me some more with your blade, torture me, humiliate me, castrate me, feed me lard, raise me into the most disgusting of fatties, and then squeeze out my fat and use it for lamps!

Everything is okay, as long as you don't kill me right here.

I beg of you.

Whether or not he had heard Zhou Tong's thought, Chen Changsheng drew his sword.

There was no disgrace or torture, no callous vengeance, only a bright sword glow, a clean killing intent.

With a swish, a fine line of blood appeared on Zhou Tong's neck and then quickly expanded. Ultimately, his head parted from his body.

Zhou Tong died, his eyes wide open in confusion.

The final question in his mind was probably 'Why was it so simple?'

Chen Changsheng looked no more at Zhou Tong's corpse. He walked up to Mo Yu and said, "You came."

Mo Yu replied, "Yes, I've come."

She felt rather tired and sat right on the ground.

Chen Changsheng also felt rather tired and sat on the ground next to her.

A shadow in the corner of the street slightly rippled as Zhexiu appeared. He was also very tired, but he did not sit down, because he knew that there was still another battle to fight.

The earth shook, a storm of thundering hooves loosening the snow.

Several hundred black-armored Imperial Guard arrived on the scene.

Xiao De and the other experts stood nearby.

Ten-some blue-robed Daoists of unfathomable cultivation had also appeared at some point.

Suddenly, the sound of hooves rose up again. A young eunuch on a horse came bearing a yellow imperial decree in hand.

This imperial decree naturally came from the palace.

The young eunuch announced to all present the charges against Zhou Tong, twenty-two in total.

These twenty-two crimes were counted up afterwards. At the time, no one had the mind to remember the details too clearly.

Everyone was in shock, from the officials of the Department for Purging Officials to the soldiers of the Imperial Guard.

Chen Changsheng also could not remember the current scene.

He only remembered that the young eunuch's voice was rather shrill and fleeting, sometimes close and sometimes far. In short, it didn't seem real.

He could also faintly remember that the imperial decree also mentioned something about death by a thousand cuts at the very end.

But Zhou Tong had already become a pile of mangled blood and flesh on the snow, his head already parted from his body.

It was no longer possible for him to thank the emperor for this kindness.

Chapter 724 – Sailing the Boat with the Current

As the reading of the decree came to an end, a deathly stillness hung in the air.

The crowd stared at the snow and at the beheaded Zhou Tong, their emotions stunned and in complete chaos.

To describe this man as strung through and through with evil would not be excessive. This person was guilty without a doubt, but no one had ever expected for the Imperial Court to announce that he was guilty.

The crowd turned their gazes to the young man and woman sitting next to each other.

The black-armored cavalry somewhat stiffly pulled on the reins of their horses, not knowing what they should do. Should they charge or put down their leveled spears? The redcoated cavalry and officials of the Department for Purging Officials all had pale faces and looked like grieving parents. The assassins of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets, the experts from the military, and even Xiao De were just trying to figure out what was going on.

The situation had changed suddenly, so suddenly that even those involved found themselves unprepared.

Even Chen Changsheng and Mo Yu did not react for a few

moments. Only when the young eunuch departed did they faintly begin to understand something.

Since this was all known, why act this way? Many people might have thought this way, but not the two of them.

"Only those idiots would think like that." Mo Yu pushed her disorderly hair behind her temples and gazed at the crowd that still surrounded them, a mocking smile on her lips. "If Zhou Tong were still alive, he would still be a valued minister of the state. It's only because we've killed him that they've decided to flay his flesh and stew his bones."

"This has always been Master's way of doing things."

Chen Changsheng felt today's snow and wind to be rather piercing. He gazed silently in the direction of the Imperial Palace and then elaborated, "When we were small, I and Senior believed that he was a poor Daoist. Because he was too poor, he had very extreme views of the world, and his way of doing things was excessively stingy. Now I understand that this isn't called being stingy, but completely using up one's resources."

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A snowstorm enveloped the Imperial Palace, but the dilongs running underneath this side palace were blazing along, making

the room as warm as spring. On the table were several imperial edicts from years past.

"I did not expect that your junior brother would truly be able to kill Zhou Tong. His performance exceeded my imagination, and so I am very satisfied. I am even more satisfied by the method he and Mo Yu used to kill Zhou Tong. The crueller and more unyielding their methods, the more shocking the story, the more it will be remembered. Naturally, Zhou Tong's evils will be included in this story."

Shang Xingzhou gazed at the young emperor seated behind the table. "Although Zhou Tong betrayed your mother and was used by me, nobody can deny that he served as your mother's representative for many years. Thus, his evil is your mother's evil, and the more of his evil Chen Changsheng reveals, the more the image of your mother will suffer, and the smaller the blame will be placed on me for leading the rebellion against her. At the same time, the more your junior brother's prestige rises, the more my prestige will rise as well. No matter how one looks at it, I gain nothing but advantages from tonight's affair, so long as I promptly promulgated that decree."

Yu Ren was thinking about the books in Xining Village's old temples, the fish in the stream, the beasts in the mountains...

Shang Xingzhou continued, "This way of doing things seems rather petty, but it is not stinginess. It is using things to their full extent."

Yu Ren raised his head and gestured a question: "Could it be that

everyone in the capital has been used by you from the beginning?"

"At the very beginning it was not the case. Of course I wanted to protect Zhou Tong, and I was also intending to do a few other things tonight."

Shang Xingzhou very patiently explained, "But in the course of events, things began to change, so I changed in response."

To cultivators, change was a constant law under the starry sky. Everything in the world changed at every moment, and the same applied to this situation. Even in the span of a few hours, many changes would take place, like the spring weather thawing the thick ice on the river. If the response was not appropriate, even the sturdiest metal bridge would be washed away.

Shang Xingzhou did not explain what the changes were.

Perhaps it was that Chen Changsheng's strength had surpassed everyone's expectations and he had been able to last an entire day, that his sword had cut through the hard and frozen ground and revealed Zhou Prison under the starlight. Or perhaps it was that the Li Palace had remained quiet all this time, the snow and clouds drifting over the sky there like meek flocks of sheep that never once had any intention of crossing the fence. Of course, the most likely possibility was when Wang Po had cut off his arm, broken through into the next realm, and killed Tie Shu.

And there were also the lanterns of the princely estates on the Road of Peace extinguishing one by one.

"Do you know why your teacher is called [Shang Xingzhou](#)?"

Shang Xingzhou suddenly asked.

Yu Ren knew that Shang Xingzhou was not his master's real name. At the very least, six hundred years ago, he had been called Daoist Ji.

The appearance, or obtaining, of this name inevitably had some meaning.

"Before His Majesty returned to the sea of stars, he did not forget that phrase: '[Waters can carry a boat, and they can also capsize them.](#)'"

Shang Xingzhou's gaze fell on a certain part of the hall, his eyes seeming to travel back centuries.

Everyone on the continent knew of this famous saying, and Yu Ren was naturally no exception. And he also knew that 'His Majesty' here referred not to his father, but to his grandfather.

"On that night, His Majesty said to me, 'To walk through the world is like sailing a boat across the ocean. One must be cautious and mindful, and one cannot go against the current, or else one will capsize the boat.'"

Shang Xingzhou very calmly added, "Since everyone wants Zhou Tong to die, since this is the desire of the people, I must follow."

The word 'follow' was a very important word to the master and students of Xining Village's old temple, as this was the Dao that they cultivated.

Only tonight did Yu Ren realize that its origins lay in this saying: 'Waters can carry a boat, and they can also capsize them.'

Shang Xingzhou continued, "Of course, following the current does not mean obedience. The boat can only hope that the waters are calmer, that there are fewer waves, that there is not too much resistance."

Yu Ren gestured, "But in the final analysis, the boat must still revere the existence of the waters."

"The Duke of Wei once said, '[The resentment of this minister need not be feared; only the people should be feared. They can carry the boat and capsize the boat, so they must be treated with deep caution.](#)' How could I not fear them?"

Shang Xingzhou looked into Yu Ren's eyes and said, "But positions are relative. Since you are the boat, you cannot think too much about what the water is thinking."

Yu Ren gestured, "In the end, you still have to think about it, or else Master would not have changed his mind."

"Everyone thinks that I have already done my best, but I was just stopped by you and them."

Shang Xingzhou's gaze fell on Yu Ren's waist, on that jade pendant gifted by the Qiushan clan head.

"All of you youths are putting your lives on the line. You are, Mo Yu is, Wang Po is, and so is your junior brother.

"I raised your junior brother for seventeen years. How could I bear to kill him? I could only watch as he killed Zhou Tong.

"Anyone can ask me about tonight's matter and I will have a clear conscience."

Just which part of these words was real and which was fake, Yu Ren found impossible to distinguish, but he understood.

Zhou Tong was the new government's ugliest and filthiest stain, and Chen Changsheng was that intractable thorn in his master's heart.

His master did not care who died, just as long as he did not have to personally carry out the deed.

Today, several soul-stirring battles and pursuits that had taken place in the capital were highly likely to shake the entire human

world, but it had all been under his master's control.

No matter what changed, he would always end up as the final victor.

If Wang Po had been killed by Tie Shu in the Luo River, perhaps this victory would have been perfect.

"This was no scheme designed by me. I cannot control everything. After all, I'm not a god, nor am I Emperor Taizong."

Shang Xingzhou rejected Yu Ren's thoughts and said, "Today is more like a lesson. If Your Majesty wishes to be as great a man as Emperor Taizong and lead humanity into a future of endless light, Your Majesty must learn how to sail the boat with the current. No matter how much Your Majesty loathes the idiotic masses that cheer at torture, Your Majesty must still convince yourself into truly believing that they are a true ocean, must learn how to lead them, how to deceive them, how to borrow their strength and break through the waves."

Yu Ren could not understand all this, nor was he very concerned about it. He was only concerned about one thing.

He gestured with his hands, "Master, do you truly not like Junior Brother?"

Shang Xingzhou pondered this question, and then smiled. "Yes, I don't like him. I dearly wish for him to die, or perhaps I wish that

he never lived in the first place."

1.Xingzhou '行舟' translates to 'sailing a boat'.

2. A saying from the 'Xunzi', a book on the Chinese philosophy of Legalism written during the Warring States era. Apparently, this particular line was a saying favored by the actual Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty.

3. This line was written by one of the real Emperor Taizong's chancellors, Wei Zheng.

Chapter 725 – Coronation

Everyone knew that Shang Xingzhou did not like his student Chen Changsheng.

As for the reason, Yu Ren and Chen Changsheng had some inkling and were currently understanding more and more.

But to the people beyond Xining Village's old temple, this had always been a most incomprehensible question.

From a familial perspective, Shang Xingzhou had raised Chen Changsheng since he was a baby. Even if it had all been part of his plan from the start, Chen Changsheng still should have been someone that was worthier of his trust than other people. Even from a logical perspective, perhaps Shang Xingzhou wanted to achieve the unprecedented feat of a complete unification of humanity so as to defeat the demons, but in truth, supporting Mu Jiushi to ascend to the throne of the Pope and making an alliance with the Great Western Continent were not necessarily any better than having Chen Changsheng become Pope and granting the Imperial Court the full support of the Li Palace.

No person could understand Shang Xingzhou's mind, and even the Pope's speculations had been groundless. After Chen Changsheng and Shang Xingzhou had brushed past each other on that morning in the Mausoleum of Books, all this had very naturally occurred, but in those stories, Shang Xingzhou had never once made his position clear, never once declared that he wanted Chen Changsheng dead. Even if this was a secret known to the entire world, it had never once been written down on paper, had

never been attached to an action. Only tonight, in his confession to Yu Ren, did Shang Xingzhou reveal for the first time his intentions to the world.

The starry sky instantly dimmed as an invisible killing intent enveloped the capital.

Whether Chen Changsheng lived or died hinged upon his own efforts and upon Shang Xingzhou's stance, and now it was closely tied to the life or death of another mighty figure.

The Li Palace had long since made its position clear. The Pope would not permit Shang Xingzhou to harm Chen Changsheng in any way.

The problem was, how many more days could the Pope live?

On that night in the Li Palace, ultimately not a single incident occurred. The shreds of starlight torn apart by the falling snow and scattered clouds fell upon Madam Mu's clothes, making her sublime beauty seem almost unreal.

As dawn was just about to break, Shang Xingzhou finally left the Imperial Palace, arriving amongst the gray eaves of those five exquisite, beautiful, and divine old temples of the Li Palace.

By the time he made his formal appearance, Madam Mu had already left, bringing away with her the snow-filled sky and starlight.

Excluding the Pope, the Li Palace would only ever permit one Saint at a time inside. Any more would mean a war against the Orthodoxy.

On that night, Shang Xingzhou and the Pope engaged in a very long conversation, most likely the last conversation they would have in their lives. Nobody knew what they discussed or whether the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy reached any sort of agreement, but starting from the next day, a warm spring breeze descended early over the capital, an atmosphere of reconciliation gradually spreading over the capital. Zhexiu and Mo Yu were brought to the Grand Court of Revision. The former was dispatched directly to the north by the military while the latter returned to the Orange Garden under house arrest.

It was still winter and this spring breeze was naturally fabricated. Everyone knew that this situation might persist for a very long time or suddenly fall apart at a moment's notice.

Nobody knew how many more days the Pope could last, or whether Shang Xingzhou would abide by that promise he made that night after the Pope returned to the sea of stars.

The mood in the capital gradually grew tense once more. Many people were already able to see the violent gales and torrential rains—no, it was winter, so it should have been called a blizzard.

In the midst of this unease and expectation, as the new year approached, a great snow fell over the capital, completely

engulfing the streets and buildings of the capital in a dazzling display of white.

The Li Palace cloaked in white was astonishingly beautiful.

Chen Changsheng supported the Pope as they walked out of that quiet and serene palace and came to the largest of the plazas in the Li Palace.

In these past few years, he had been a frequent visitor to the Li Palace, but the place he most often visited was that quiet and serene palace hall. This was his first time coming with the Pope to this place.

The white snow over the gray stones of the plaza was like a layer of felt. Those stone pillars which seemed disorderly, yet were actually set according to some vague law, were already covered in white. Chen Changsheng's spiritual sense could clearly sense that an extremely ancient Qi was hidden below the plaza. If it was an array, then it was no weaker than the Imperial Design.

He gazed into the distance at the vague silhouettes of the palace halls in the snow. He knew that these were the famous Grass Moon Hall, Pure Cassia Temple, the Moss Institute... The Li Palace had six halls, each hall holding a precious treasure that symbolized the Orthodoxy's history and unparalleled might, thus resulting in the gradual appearance of the Six Prefects.

He knew why the Pope had brought him here.

The firm and sacred Qis rising up from the Grass Moon Hall, the Pure Cassia Palace, and the rest of the six halls were currently acknowledging their allegiance to him.

"The snow this year is too great."

The Pope's gaze pierced through the snow into the distant north, his wrinkled and spotted face showing concern for the future. "With the internal discord of Xuelao City, the unprecedented weakness of the demons, who knows how many tribes will be at odds against each other through this storm, how much slaughter it will incite? With the beginning of spring next year, the wolf cavalry will assuredly march south."

A snowstorm was both very beautiful and very cruel. The demons would certainly suffer enormous damage, and with the rebellion, it was simply impossible for Xuelao City to recover its strength in such a short time. Under these circumstances, for the Pope to conclude that the Demon Army would march south next year seemed completely groundless, but Chen Changsheng understood that this prediction was certain to come true. The demons were a most insane and frightening species. The weaker they were, the more bloodthirsty and cruel they became. This was because they clearly understood that only in this way could they pass through their most trying hours.

The Pope sighed, "Since both sides loathe each other, it would be best to leave as soon as possible."

These words seemed without head or tail, and only Chen Changsheng could understand them. After the coup of the

Mausoleum of Books, many people had guessed that he wanted to leave the capital. In truth, he had wanted to leave all this time, but he was keenly aware at the time that his master would not let him leave unless he was dead.

It now seemed that the conversation between the two Saints that night in the Li Palace had managed to change some things.

"Very well," he replied.

The Pope looked at him and said, "You are my chosen successor. No matter how many years pass, you must return."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Whenever I am needed, I will return."

The Pope said, "He wishes to speak with you."

Chen Changsheng thought this over, then agreed, "Okay."

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As the Li Palace emitted light, the snow falling from the sky seemed like the heavenly flowers scattered about the Divine Kingdom, possessing an intoxicating beauty.

The priests and cavalry of the Orthodoxy and all levels of clergy stood in the plaza, occasionally illuminated like the rising sun over the vast ocean.

The Great Hall of Light shone with incomparable brightness. It was impossible to look at directly and possessed an indescribable majesty.

Within the great hall, several thousand cardinals and archbishops bowed, their faces pious and reverential.

The stone wall slowly parted. Under the stone gazes of the twelve sages and the spirits of the Divine Kingdom, the Pope and Chen Changsheng walked out of the light.

The Pope received the Divine Crown from Mao Qiuyu and placed it upon Chen Changsheng's head.

Chen Changsheng gripped the Divine Staff and walked to the very front, to receive blessings and to grant them.

His body was somewhat stiff, but his expression was exceptionally solemn. Not a single hair was out of place, and not a single mistake in the process occurred. Even the finest of requirements in the Daoist scriptures had been fulfilled. It was perfection.

Chapter 726 – A Grand Inheritance

Chen Changsheng stood in the light, at the very front.

The Pope stood behind him.

In the great hall, several thousand bishops kneeled upon the ground like a tide.

On the plaza, tens of thousands of Orthodoxy cavalry and priests kneeled upon the ground like a tide.

Outside the Li Palace, hundreds of thousands of believers kneeled upon the ground like a tide.

At this sight, the Pope slowly squinted his eyes as if completely satisfied and delighted at drinking a most excellent wine.

His eyes squinted more and more until they closed and then never opened again.

From this moment on, no one would be able to see the vast sea of stars contained within those elderly eyes.

Chen Changsheng turned his head, the hand holding the Divine Staff slightly trembling.

Mao Qiuyu held up the Pope's body and shook his head at him.

The nearby crowd became faintly restless, but it did not fall into disorder. Led by An Lin and the other archbishops, everyone continued to kneel, but...there was the occasional choked sob.

Odes intended to cleanse the Dao heart, brimming with reminiscence and sobs of sorrow, floated higher and higher over the grandiose Great Hall of Light, but then were temporarily brought back to the world of mortals by the toll of a bell.

Whether it was the sacred bell of the Li Palace or the sacred bells of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education and the Heavenly Dao Academy, they all rang together.

The toll of the bell quickly spread to the entire capital and then beyond, sending the news that the Pope had returned to the sea of stars to all corners of the continent.

Chachachacha, countless sounds of metal scraping on metal rose up in the air.

The Orthodoxy cavalry in the plaza of the Li Palace pulled out their weapons, a black wave appearing amongst the sea of people.

Whether divine crossbow, spear, blade, or sword, they were all cold and sharp and aimed straight up at the night sky, aimed at those millions upon millions of solemn, quiet, and unchanging stars above. This was not a show of military force by the human world towards the sea of stars but a cheer, a grand ceremony to send their lord off to the great beyond.

The Grass Moon Hall, the Pure Cassia Temple, the Clearwater Terrace, the Hall of the Heavenly Dao, and the Autumn Residence were the six most important halls of the Li Palace. At this moment, six most hallowed and grand Qis emerged from these halls and soared into the cold and desolate night sky. At some place in the depths of the night sky, they united and formed six streams of light.

These lights were all of different colors so that they seemed to form a rainbow.

No one had ever seen a rainbow at night before. The people kneeling in the Li Palace and the common people kneeling in the various parts of the capital began to raise their heads. In shock at this phenomenon in the sky, they thought with anguish, is this the mortal world's final farewell to His Holiness?

Chen Changsheng knew that this was no rainbow, but power.

When those six streams of Qi emerged from the Grass Moon Hall and the other six halls, he and all the other cultivators in the capital of Star Condensation level and above could clearly sense that power. This power came from the precious treasures of the Orthodoxy ensconced in the six halls and it also came from the ground upon which the Li Palace stood. To be more precise, it came from the array beneath it.

The way of the Dao had existed for countless years but it had been esteemed as the Orthodoxy for close to a thousand. Before

that, it had also been referred to as the Orthodoxy by no small number of famous dynasties. It had a deep history and abundant resources. In certain aspects, not even the Imperial Court could compare to it. It would not be strange for it to have this sort of array or possess more divine artifacts that no one else knew about.

One such artifact was the torch hanging over a certain bed: the White Sun Flame.

This sacred artifact of the demons had been kept in the Lingyan Pavilion for many years, serving as a major part of the Imperial Design. After the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, the Tianhai Divine Empress had cast the Frost God Spear and destroyed the Lingyan Pavilion. The portraits within the pavilion had been rendered completely into dust while the Frost God Spear had vanished. People generally thought that it had been stored back in the Imperial Palace.

But no one had imagined that the White Sun Flame could have ended up in the Li Palace.

It had once been a sacred artifact of the demons, later on a precious treasure of the Great Zhou, and now it was being used as an ordinary light.

The blazing divine flame was not dazzling and its light gave off no warmth. If it were to shine upon the Pope's elderly face, it would most likely not have upset him in the slightest.

Chen Changsheng sat by the bed and finished reading for the

ninth time the Classic of Longevity. He then stood up and gazed at the White Sun Flame and the quiet palace hall that it illuminated.

The Orthodoxy was the inheritance the Pope had left for him, and the White Sun Flame naturally formed a part of this inheritance. So did the Divine Crown, the Divine Staff, the precious treasures in the six halls, the Li Palace's array, and also those countless believers and priests still kneeling within and without the Li Palace, unwilling to leave. And there was also authority.

But he remembered very clearly that there should be another part of this inheritance. Yet he did not know where it was.

In the past, the Pope had clearly expressed his meaning that after he died, that item would be Chen Changsheng's to safeguard.

Where had the Green Leaf gone to?

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Six divine Qis combined into a sublime rainbow in the night. One end of this rainbow was in the Li Palace. Though the rainbow ran across the sea of stars, it ultimately fell back onto the mortal world.

Many places in the capital were illuminated and adorned by this

rainbow. It was very difficult to tell which place received more light and blessing.

Everyone on this great earth could see the vast sea of stars, but the starlight had never illuminated every part of the world. Close to the Imperial City, the abandoned well in New North Bridge saw no sun and no starlight year-round. Today, however, this place was mystically filled with light. This light was a part of the rainbow that was rising from the Li Palace.

This underground cavern that had been frigid and pitch-black for centuries was not warmed by this light, but it was no longer so terrifying, especially when the light shone upon the snow on the ground. In doing so, it also shone upon many objects on the ground, thus imbuing this place cut off from the human world with some of its flavor.

Stoves of all sorts were scattered around, making the place seem like a termite nest. There were also all sorts of kitchen utensils, with pans, bowls, ladles, and basins of every sort. Coal from Tu Province, particularly known for the strength at which it burned, was piled up like a small mountain, and there were ten-some metal pots of varying size and thickness. The specially constructed table that seemed like the surface of a lake was piled high with every sort of food that a normal person could possibly imagine.

Around three hundred zhang away from this place was an area that probably served the purpose of a study. There were no walls and so naturally no painting or calligraphy hanging upon them. There was only a seemingly endless bookshelf brimming with books. As one walked along the bookshelf, furniture of all sorts of

styles would appear along it—a desk, a chair, an imperial concubine sofa—until when one walked very far...

Here was a particularly massive bed, not very much smaller than the lake in the Orthodox Academy. This bed was ostentatiously decorated, its surface completely covered in carvings and its railing studded with seventy-two Night Pearls. Just by looking at it, one could imagine how comfortable lying in this bed would be.

The Black Dragon girl called Zhizhi, and also Zhusha, and also Hongzhuang, was currently lying on this bed, but it was obvious that she did not find it very comfortable. It was not because some unremarkable bean was buried at the bottom of the thirty-six layers of bedding, nor was it because the last blue lobster Chen Changsheng left had not been very fresh, but because she was currently very nervous.

The rainbow rising from the Li Palace illuminated the underground cavern, and it also illuminated the wall that she did not wish to face ten-some li away.

She was a Black Frost Dragon, one of the noblest beings in the world and possessing the most powerful of magical powers. She could see a silver leaf tens of thousands of li away, so she also could clearly see that a change was occurring on that distant wall: a collection of green leaves had appeared on that ice-covered stone wall.

Chapter 727 – Redemption, and a New Legend

The stone wall was carved with portraits of Qin Zhong and Yu Gong, two Divine Generals of the previous generation. Their painted hands held two chains that were tied around the girl's feet. This was the array that Wang Zhice had laid down all those many years ago. In the ensuing centuries, no one, the little Black Dragon included, had the strength to pull these two chains from the wall. Even through using the Canon of Flowing West and his own blood, Chen Changsheng was only able to hope that this feat would be possible after two years. Logically speaking, a stone wall imbued with such a powerful array was inevitably cut off from any external organisms and no plants should have been able to grow on its surface, but now there was a Green Leaf growing from it.

There were only three leaves on this Green Leaf, and it had originally been fat and tender. Now, however, it looked rather thin and weak, as if it had lost a great deal of energy.

Perhaps it was because this Green Leaf was spreading too many roots?

Countless roots so thin that they were difficult to pick out with the naked eye were growing out of the bottom of the Green Leaf and spreading across the portraits on the stone wall. Some of the roots had found the smallest of cracks and burrowed into the wall. Upon probing inside, they would begin to almost frenziedly grow under the light of the rainbow.

The rainbow from the Li Palace and the Green Leaf were

currently attempting to break this array.

The little Black Dragon had no idea what was going on, why this was taking place, so she was very perplexed and nervous. Her small face was pale, the cinnabar birthmark between her eyebrows all the more striking.

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What bathed the world was not starlight, but the rainbow.

When all the colors of a rainbow gathered in one place, it would be colorless. Noiseless and unbeknownst to all, it cast its light on New North Bridge, and it also shone upon the Frost Flower Market.

In the Frost Flower Market was a seemingly unremarkable, but actually heavily guarded, garden called the Orange Garden, Mo Yu's residence and her current prison for her house arrest.

The array within the Orange Garden was like thin snow under the blazing sun, silently melting away under the light of this colorless, invisible rainbow. No one was alarmed, neither people nor the frogs hibernating within the snow.

Several small lanterns made from orange peels hung over the window. They were very cute, and the light penetrating through

them was red and seemed warmer than usual.

Mo Yu kneeled on a prayer mat, facing in the direction of the Li Palace. Her eyes were closed, her long lashes slightly fluttering. She felt an incredible warmth.

This was the Pope's final redemption to her. Perhaps it was related to the arrangements she had made back then to bring Chen Changsheng into the Orthodox Academy or perhaps it wasn't, but it was a redemption nonetheless.

The rainbow vanished, and the precious treasures of the Orthodoxy within the Grass Moon Hall and the other five halls gradually grew calm.

The frigid air over New North Bridge grew even colder. Even that black hole in the ground had been ruptured apart by the cold.

The orange trees of Frost Flower Market were decorated with a new layer of frost, a beautiful sight rare to see. The lanterns in front of the window were still warm, but there was no one atop the prayer mat.

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The Pope's funeral was very quickly conducted. All the preparations had long been in place.

The diplomatic missions from White Emperor City and the south had remained after the celebrations because they had all mentally prepared themselves for this.

It was precisely because everything was already prepared that the people of the world felt anguish, but not shock. Nor did too many people feel fear or unease.

From autumn to winter, the Great Zhou had lost two Saints, and the Storms of the Eight Directions had suffered even greater losses. If one also added Su Li and the Holy Maiden of the south, who had departed beforehand, in the short span of a few years, the number of peak cultivators humanity possessed had undergone a steep decline. However, in the view of the common people, the demons had suffered even greater losses through their civil war and so they would not have courage to bring their armies south.

Some people did not think this way, such as the Pope who had already returned to the sea of stars. Besides him, those who knew the truth of the matter also began to feel more and more nervous as time passed.

The Li Palace had already made an announcement, so the entire world knew that Chen Changsheng was the new Pope of the Orthodoxy, even if he had not yet formally ascended to the throne.

The shocking and confusing fact was that no one had seen him during the Pope's funeral.

This was almost unimaginable, but both the Li Palace and the Imperial Court remained silent on the issue as if there was a tacit agreement between the two sides. And what was this tacit agreement? Was it that agreement made after the long conversation the Pope and Shang Xingzhou had, on the night when Wang Po and Chen Changsheng killed Zhou Tong? Or were both sides waiting for a certain moment to come?

As the new year approached, another yellow page would be ripped off the calendar, and the winter sun would rise over the horizon once more. Many things would change.

On New Year's Day, the Great Zhou Dynasty would formally change eras and the young emperor's status would become unshakable. On the same day, the Li Palace would conduct a succession ceremony and the Orthodoxy would welcome a new master.

The young Emperor and young Pope were martial brothers.

Nothing of the kind had ever happened before.

This also meant that the current Emperor and Pope were both Shang Xingzhou's students.

This was also something that had never happened before.

From every angle conceivable, this was the greatest peak to which one could ascend in life, and was perhaps even

unimaginable before all this had occurred.

He had led the entire world in overthrowing the rule of the Tianhai Divine Empress, predicted and even perhaps taken part in the destruction of the Demon Lord, subdued the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets with the wave of a hand, and now the two disciples that he had personally raised were about to become the two most important people of the mortal and religious spheres. Even if Shang Xingzhou was not a god, he had already become a legend.

Somewhat regretfully, nothing in this world was truly perfect. Fate, which reigned above the starry sky, would not allow such a thing to occur.

That problem still needed addressing, no matter how incomprehensible people found it that Chen Changsheng would be so confrontational with his own teacher. It still needed addressing, no matter how perplexed people were at why Shang Xingzhou so disliked, even loathed this disciple that he should have trusted...in short, this problem had to be addressed.

This was no longer merely a problem between teacher and disciple. It now concerned the fate of all of humanity, perhaps the world.

Just what would happen on New Year's Day? The first civil war in the Great Zhou Dynasty's history?

Snowstorms continued to rage. The Grass Moon Hall, the Pure

Cassia Palace, and the Moss Institute were all dyed white. A lonely trail of footprints could be seen on the snow.

The streets outside the Li Palace were completely deserted. An invisible energy was constantly rippling between those famous stone pillars.

Whether it was the priests or ministers of the various halls, the students and teachers of the Ivy Academies, or the more than twenty thousand Orthodoxy cavalry, not a single person came out.

The various barracks of the Imperial Court within the capital were at the highest state of alert. Several Divine Generals were leading the world-famous black-armored heavy cavalry back south from the snowy plains of the north and were currently garrisoned at Black Mountain Valley. Based on the time needed for this journey, this terrifying flood of armored cavalry had left the Northern Army twenty days ago, when the Pope had still been alive.

The atmosphere in the capital was abnormally tense.

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On New Year's Eve, snow was still falling, and it could even be called a raging snowstorm.

The capital had suffered a particularly harsh winter this year. Nobody knew that this was for the most part due to the abandoned well near the Imperial City.

The afterglow of the setting sun barely managed to peek through the clouds and snow, shedding an extremely faint twilight against the walls of the palace.

Suddenly, an unimaginably cold Qi flooded out of the abandoned well. Both dried leaves and mud were instantly frozen rock-hard. Even the ice and snow, through some other, more incomprehensible method, were frozen again. Even the twilight seemed to be frozen.

A sound that had originally been very crisp came up from the depths of the well to the surface. It was already faint, even weaker than the sobbing sound that followed it.

A girl was crying.

She was crying nonstop, but the emotions expressed by this sobbing changed every moment. Sometimes it was incredibly happy and excited, other times particularly dismal and sad.

The soldiers of the Imperial City and the commoners in their houses all heard the sobbing of this young girl, but they did not know where it came from; they looked all over but could not find the source. They found it even more puzzling that a little girl was outside on such a frigid day and was still alive, and was even constantly crying. She cried from dusk until the late night, never

once stopping for a break.

From that day on, in New North Bridge, a new legend appeared alongside the legend of the evil dragon.

The main character of this legend was a child daughter-in-law killed by her heartless mother-in-law.

Chapter 728 – The Conversation in the Snowy Night

In the late night, the cold was even more severe. The layers of ice and snow surrounding the abandoned well were as hard as stone.

A small hand appeared along the brim of the well, white and clean under the lanterns shining from the Imperial City. Not even all the snow in the sky could be as white or as cold as this hand.

The small hand exerted itself, snow rustled and crumbled, and a girl climbed out of the well. This sight was truly very similar to a certain horror story.

The girl stood in the snow. As her breath met the air, it transformed into an enveloping fog of crystals. It wasn't because her breath was hot, but because it was too cold.

She wore a black dress, somewhat shabby and very old. It posed a striking contrast to this world of white snow.

After several centuries, Zhizhi finally left that gloomy and, to her at least, particularly cramped underground world, stepping into the world of humans once more.

The current human world had long since forgotten that particularly ruthless Black Frost Dragon from many years ago, and she also found the human world incredibly strange.

Her spiritual soul had once been forcefully extracted from her dragon body by the Tianhai Divine Empress and inserted into the black jade ruyi so that she could accompany Chen Changsheng to the Garden of Zhou. In that period of time, she had seen the streets of the capital, the green trees by the lake, the hustle and bustle of Wenshui, and that valley under the twilight. However, all that lay before her eyes now was still so strange.

She was no longer a spiritual soul, but real and complete.

Her bare feet could clearly sense the looseness and warmth of the snow.

The ends of her hair could clearly sense the gentle and pleasing touch of the winter winds.

She could use her own eyes, not her consciousness, to see the real snow. She could even see the real starry sky behind the clouds of snow. Ah, the countless stars—even after hundreds of years, all of you are still in the same place, still shining with that same beautiful silver light. But will my hometown of the southern islands still have the same old appearance?

The sense of strangeness and sense of reality constantly tangled and clashed against each other in her mind, ultimately transforming into the most real sense of timidity.

She had no idea that, in the near future, she would become the newest legend of the human world, even though her existence as a noble and powerful dragon was a legend in itself to humanity. She

was only afraid of this strange world.

This world was the world of humans, the human world that was brimming with humans, and humans were what she was the most afraid of.

Any being, noble or lowly, powerful or weak, at its weakest, most perplexed, and most frightened moment, would always search out its most familiar support. This support might be a tree, a stone, perhaps a window, and it might even be a person.

Zhou Tong's mind on the verge of death was dazzled, so it only knew to crawl towards the alley of the Northern Military Department.

At this time, her mind also held only one name: Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng was the being in the world that she was the most familiar with and that she trusted the most. In addition, for a few reasons secret to her, she firmly believed that he had to take responsibility for her. Thus, after she came to her senses, she began heading without hesitation towards the nearby Orthodox Academy, her bare feet stamping out a clear trail in the snow.

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The Orthodox Academy and the neighboring Hundred Herb Garden were both under heavy guard. The Orthodoxy cavalry and the troops of the Imperial Court had sealed off the entire block. Both sides silently stared at each other from their respective camps, the atmosphere extremely tense. Nobody knew what might happen next.

The situation in the capital was constantly changing. After the Pope returned to the sea of stars, it was still not possible to tell what the people yearned for, but assessments were slowly beginning to favor the Imperial Court. Teachers and students had left the Orthodox Academy in great numbers, leaving only one-third of the original number behind. The eighteen female disciples of South Stream Temple and Su Moyu had naturally remained, but all of them understood that it was impossible for them to influence what happened next in any way. The only two people that could truly decide the end of all this were currently under the great banyan tree by the lake.

No one in the capital could sleep tonight, because many people knew that the master and disciple were conducting their final negotiation.

The snowstorms over the past few days had been rather fierce. The Orthodox Academy was just like all the other places in the capital, buried under a thick mantle of snow. The dead grass by the lake had been utterly drowned. Only in a few slightly depressed areas could one see a few tips of dead grass that seemed to exude an aura of obstinacy.

The great banyan tree had shed its leaves long ago, but its bare

branches were still as firm as ever, sturdy enough for quite a few people to stand atop them.

Chen Changsheng was not standing on the tree, but on the snow-covered ground beneath it, as his teacher was also standing in the snow.

This was the first time this master and disciple had met after that morning in the Mausoleum of Books. On that day, they had passed each other on the Divine Path like strangers, gazing straight past each other. This time, their gazes truly met and so each of them could clearly tell how the other had changed since that period in Xining Village.

Chen Changsheng was already Pope, but he did not wear the Divine Robe, did not bear the Divine Crown, and did not grip the Divine Staff. Instead, he wore the uniform of the Orthodox Academy, his hair meticulously combed into the simplest of Daoist topknots. What ran through his black hair to fasten his topknot was not some precious ebony hairpin, but a normal wooden chopstick.

Shang Xingzhou had a full head of black hair with no hint of white which was similarly combed meticulously. His face carried a noble and composed aura, exuding an indescribable elegance and ease. However, his clothes were very simple: just a blue Daoist robe. He did not truly seem like the supreme individual of the present age, but a normal Daoist.

If someone were to see this sight, they would get the impression that from a certain perspective, this master and his disciple were

very similar. This was not merely an external similarity, but it was also in that deep tinge of indifference on their faces and that sense of disaffection hidden behind their calm exteriors.

Chen Changsheng was prepared to open his mouth and speak, but he realized that he had no idea what to say.

It had already been several years since he last spoke with the man standing across from him. To cultivators, a few years was a very short amount of time, but he still felt it to be very long, so long that the memories related to Xining Village and that old temple had become somewhat hazy. At the very least, memories of certain things had already become difficult to clearly recall.

He could still clearly remember the mottled spots on the walls of the old temple after the Daoist scriptures were moved. He still clearly remembered that on the night before he left, his senior brother had cooked four vegetable dishes, each having a different taste and style, and that one of them had contained a lot of garlic. And yet he could not remember what his final words with his master were.

At this time, Shang Xingzhou spoke.

"I picked you out from the stream. Although I knew beforehand that you would be in the stream, without me, you would have drowned in the waters of the stream or been eaten by the old dragon. In short, I saved your life and raised you into an adult, so your life is mine."

Tonight was the final night, and tomorrow would be a new day, a new day like so many countless new days before it, but the first day for the new continent. Tonight's conversation in the snow would decide whether the people of the capital and the entire continent would be able to pass the morrow as they had for the past several years, peacefully and happily welcoming the rising sun of the new year.

No one could have imagined this conversation to have started so suddenly and advanced so unyieldingly that the prologue sounded just like the ending.

Chapter 729 – A Battle of Wills between Master and Disciple

"Your life is mine."

As he spoke, Shang Xingzhou's expression was very calm, as if he was describing one of the simplest yet most unquestionable truths of the world.

The sun will rise in the east and set in the west, the starry sky will forever remain unchanging, and eggs are best fried with oil.

After hearing these words, Chen Changsheng very naturally thought of that famous sight that occurred in Mount Li's internal strife on that year.

Lord and minister, father and son, master and disciple: these were the three most difficult-to-break laws in the world.

At the time, when the Qiushan clan head spoke the words 'father and son', even an extraordinary individual like Qiushan Jun was forced to run his sword through his chest in order to break them.

How should Chen Changsheng handle it?

In truth, everyone knew that once the conflict between this master and disciple fully exploded, Shang Xingzhou would inevitably use their relationship as master and disciple to strike. Su

Moyu, the students and teachers of the Orthodox Academy, and the priests of the Li Palace were deeply concerned about this fact, but none of them could think of a way for Chen Changsheng to respond.

Chen Changsheng had naturally mentally prepared himself for this and had imagined this scene many times, so he was not surprised.

He did not speak mostly because he was reminiscing.

When he heard his master's voice, he recalled that scene at Mount Li. When he gazed at the snowbound trees around the lake, he recalled his conversation with Tang Thirty-Six.

It had been so very long ago.

At the time, he and Tang Thirty-Six stood on top of the great banyan and gazed at the capital in the twilight, the nearby Imperial Palace and the distant Li Palace.

Tang Thirty-Six had said many things. They had been warnings, and they could also be understood as slurs aimed at his master.

Chen Changsheng then began to recall the night the Pope returned to the sea of stars. Alone, he had trekked across the snowy grounds of the Li Palace for a very long time.

Before that, he had already told the Pope how he understood and

would treat this relationship of master and disciple.

He was not Qiushan Jun, and Shang Xingzhou was certainly no Qiushan clan head. Suicide by sword had no meaning here.

He did not know that Senior Yu Ren had attempted such a method in the Imperial Palace, but even if he knew, he would not emulate it.

This was because such a method was established on a certain foundation: the Qiushan clan head cherished Qiushan Jun, as Shang Xingzhou cherished Yu Ren.

Chen Changsheng had coolheadedly affirmed a very cold and callous fact: his master had never liked him.

The moment he was thoroughly convinced of this fact, he gained true calm and freedom.

So then just as he had said to the Pope and just like how Tang Thirty-Six had taught him, he should speak.

"Thank you," Chen Changsheng said to Shang Xingzhou.

No matter if it was part of some disgusting and ugly scheme meant to do shameless harm against an infant, you saved me by the stream and raised me, so...thank you.

And then...well, there was no 'and then'.

He calmly looked across the snow at the person before him, his eyes bright, not a single word more coming out of his mouth.

After a long period of silence, Shang Xingzhou slightly narrowed his eyes and slowly said, "That is it?"

Chen Changsheng pondered the question, then asked, "Does Master want me to return the cost of living for those years? Then, how much money is it in total?"

He spoke very earnestly without the slightest hint of joking in his voice.

This had never been a matter to joke about in the first place.

Even if I admit that you saved my life, I've already thanked you. What more do you want?

You want living expenses? Then say it, and I'll completely return it. I have money now, and I also have a friend who's particularly rich.

That year on the great banyan tree, when Tang Thirty-Six had said this, his brows had soared upwards as if wanting to set the twilight ablaze. He had been remarkably proud of himself.

When Chen Changsheng thought of that image, he couldn't help but perk up his lips into a smile.

Shang Xingzhou also began to laugh.

His laughter was clear and bright, completely out of sorts with his age and experience, and completely different from that silent and unremarkable middle-aged Daoist in Chen Changsheng's memories.

The snow piled on the great banyan tree's branches rustled down.

The laughter suddenly stopped.

"In the entire world, only the three of us, master and disciples, can understand why I cannot let you remain in the capital."

Shang Xingzhou looked coldly upon Chen Changsheng and said, "Because you are His Majesty's only weakness, his only flaw."

Many people did not understand why Shang Xingzhou's attitude towards Chen Changsheng was so unyielding, but this was because they did not understand the affection between Yu Ren and Chen Changsheng.

Several days ago, in a raging snowstorm, the young emperor had stood in the snow and stopped Shang Xingzhou from leaving, the jade pendant gifted by the Qiushan clan head swaying at his waist

the entire time. His resolve and will had momentarily safeguarded Chen Changsheng's life and it had further deepened Shang Xingzhou's fear.

If someone in the future were to use Chen Changsheng to threaten Yu Ren, what then?

Of course, Chen Changsheng was now the Pope of the Orthodoxy, so logically speaking, no one could possibly use him.

But if Chen Changsheng himself were to have other ideas, if he used the authority of the Pope coupled with the affection Yu Ren had for him, what would be the result?

Chen Changsheng understood, but he could not accept. He seriously said to Shang Xingzhou, "Master, you should be well aware that I am not that sort of person."

Shang Xingzhou's expression did not change. "People will always change."

He had lived in this world for a thousand years already. He had seen far too many sceneries change, seen vast seas transform into mulberry fields, and he had seen far too many people's hearts go through unforeseen changes.

He was keenly aware that as one's power and status changed, often for precisely these reasons, once-faithful subordinates would develop thoughts of sedition, once-companions willing to fight to

the death for each other would turn their weapons against each other, and brothers would quarrel. Such things had occurred so many times in the history of the Great Zhou that they had lost all novelty.

Chen Changsheng had never seen those old trials and tribulations. He was still a youth like the new breeze of the early spring.

Yet he had already seen much decay and darkness.

He said earnestly to Shang Xingzhou, "I will not change into that sort of person."

Shang Xingzhou replied, "I don't believe you."

Chen Changsheng asked, "And Master will never covet the throne of the emperor?"

Shang Xingzhou replied, "I will not, because such an action will go against the very essence of my Dao heart."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Master, you believe that you can act in accordance with your heart and will never crave the power and glory of the world, so why can't you believe me?"

Shang Xingzhou responded, "Because I am well aware of where my own heart lies, but you are too young and simply have no idea where your heart lies, so how can you preserve it?"

Chen Changsheng now naturally knew that his master's goal in life was to complete Emperor Taizong's dying wish: to exterminate the demons, to strive for a truly radiant future for humanity, to lay down a foundation for the Great Zhou that would remain constant for ten thousand generations. For this, he was willing to pay any price...

Of the portraits in the Lingyan Pavilion, of the legendary ministers drawn upon them, how many had died under Daoist Ji's hands?

In order to overturn the Tianhai Divine Empress's rule, how many people in this world had already died, and how many more would die in the future?

Shang Xingzhou firmly believed that what he did was correct, firmly believed that he was correct. There was no guilt upon his heart, and no pressure.

His Dao heart had always been brightly lit. It was light as a goose feather. With the slightest turn, it could float up into the blue sky and drift about the seven seas. Yet it was also a boulder, so what if a flood drowned away all?

Chen Changsheng cultivated the Dao of following his heart, so he naturally understood.

It was because he understood that he would feel no mercy, only a dashing drive.

He could clearly see the only flaw in Shang Xingzhou's Dao.

Xining Village's old temple had taught him much, and Shang Xingzhou had also taught him much.

"You don't like me because I am Senior's only flaw, but there is still one even more important reason."

Chen Changsheng looked into his master's eyes and declared, "You are afraid to look at me."

Chapter 730 – The Darkest Shadow

On the day in which Eunuch Lin entered the Orthodox Academy to proclaim the decree, Chen Changsheng had said something similar.

Shang Xingzhou had been in the Li Palace at the time and was speaking to the Pope. His response then was very similar to his response now.

"Truly childish."

There was still a hint of childishness on Chen Changsheng's face, but anyone could see the firmness of his demeanor.

He knew that his view was correct.

The Tianhai Divine Empress was already dead, the Pope had returned to the sea of stars, the Demon Lord had fallen into the abyss, and Wang Zhice had secluded himself from the world. There were now very few people in the world that could serve as Shang Xingzhou's rival.

His Dao heart was brightly lit, his Dao completely unhindered, his cultivation unfathomably profound.

He reigned over the Great Zhou Dynasty and possessed the friendship of White Emperor City.

He seemed invulnerable, in a state of near-perfection.

But he still had a hole, a flaw.

His flaw was not some other person, but the fact that he had never liked his young disciple Chen Changsheng.

By Xining Village's old temple ran a small stream. Flowers floated upon this stream and flowed downstream.

The temple held three thousand Daoist scriptures, but the three people within, the master and his two disciples, cultivated only one: following their heart.

Following one's heart was an incredibly formidable Dao.

To stand under the starry sky and hold one's head up with a clear conscience, to turn one's head with no regrets. Only this way could one revere nothing, fear nothing, possess a brightly lit Dao heart and an unhindered Dao.

In the ten-some years spent in Xining Village's old temple, Shang Xingzhou had never once taught Yu Ren and Chen Changsheng any sort of Dao, only had them read Daoist scriptures, but once they began to interact with actual cultivation methods, they advanced with flabbergasting speed. Chen Changsheng had taken three years to break into Star Condensation while Yu Ren had been able to freely walk about the Heavenly Tome Monoliths. All this was entirely because of their Dao.

Correspondingly, this Dao had extremely high demands on one's heart, requiring it to be like a snow lotus at the peak of a lofty mountain. Not a single speck of dirt could be allowed to stain it.

How could one prevent oneself from being confused by external things? How could one possess an unshakable will and self-confidence?

Only one word needed to be remembered: heart.

All one needed was to convince themselves.

If one could convince oneself that this way was correct, that it was in accordance with one's heart, then...one would naturally be following one's heart.

This sounded very simple, but it was not actually simple at all.

If one searched in the deepest depths of one's soul, if one ensconced oneself in a dark room cut off from the world, how many people could truly say that they were without regrets? Who could so firmly believe that everything they had done was correct?

Several hundred years ago, Shang Xingzhou had still been a member of the legitimate line of the Orthodoxy. He could have walked along the path set for him until he became Pope, but he chose another path. He used the identity of Daoist Ji to live in this world, and when Daoist Wu was painting the portraits of the

Lingyan Pavilion, he was responsible for sending the subjects of these portraits back to the sea of stars. The subjects of these paintings were all heroes of humanity, all meritorious ministers of the Great Zhou, and they had all died under this scheme. Some of them had been willing to face their deaths, such as Divine Generals Qin Zhong and Yu Gong, but what of the other dukes?

The heroic spirits of the Lingyan Pavilion had always been watching Shang Xingzhou. Perhaps those resentful souls that had died even before that in the Hundred Herb Garden had also been watching Shang Xingzhou this entire time. The innocents who had died in this recent chaos were presumably also watching him. Yet none of this could affect Shang Xingzhou's Dao heart, because he had many reasons with which to convince himself.

He viewed with contempt those so-called ruthless characters who severed their emotions, loathed most of all schemers like Black Robe who did not dare see the light of day. He regarded himself as Emperor Taizong's successor, and since his heart embraced the world, he could naturally disregard the small details. This was the necessary price to be paid so that the Great Zhou Dynasty could last ten thousand years, so that humanity could have a radiant future.

But there was still one matter that even now Shang Xingzhou had not been able to find a suitable reason to convince himself of, and that matter was Chen Changsheng.

Yes, the wooden basin floating in the stream, the infant in the basin, and the Golden Dragon's hanging whisker had all been part of his scheme.

But when he first laid eyes on Chen Changsheng, this was not the Duke of Wei, not Wang Zhice, not Tianhai, not a general who reigned over a region, not some rich scion who possessed wealth beyond imagination, not a concubine seeking power through beauty, not a repulsive eunuch, not some impassioned scholar from the Kingdom of Wu who liked intellectual conversation, not some old and experienced chancellor who adored feathers. This was just...an infant.

This was an infant who could not even open his eyes, an ignorant and unaware infant, an infant without good or evil or thought.

He could not find a single reason to convince himself that what he did was correct.

In those fourteen years, every time he saw Chen Changsheng, a doubt would appear in his mind, a shadow cast over his Dao heart.

Life in Xining Village's old temple was very simple, and to not meet was manifold times more difficult than meeting.

Chen Changsheng transformed from an infant into a youth like the spring breeze.

The shadow over Shang Xingzhou's Dao heart had already become as thick as the night.

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"I know that Teacher feels no guilt about me, that good and evil have no part in this affair. It is just that you are unable to convince yourself, and convincing yourself has always been the most important."

Chen Changsheng said to Shang Xingzhou, "So to you, my existence is a very frightening thing."

Before Buddhism was destroyed, it once had a phrase called a 'heart obstruction'.

He was currently Shang Xingzhou's heart obstruction.

Shang Xingzhou was willing to exhaust all his resources to remove this heart obstruction, as only this way could he ensure his Dao heart was brightly lit.

He hoped that Chen Changsheng would die, but he could not personally do it, as it would have no effect. On the contrary, it would only cause the heart obstruction to deepen and leave him without means of wiping it away.

Several days ago, even if Yu Ren had not used such a resolute method to have him stay in the palace, he would not have gone to the alley of the Northern Military Department, but to the Li Palace.

Back on the Divine Path of the Mausoleum of Books, he had passed Chen Changsheng on the Divine Path without even glancing at him and made no efforts to stop him from bringing down the Divine Empress's body because he had already thought of what to do afterwards.

He wished to use these matters as justification for Chen Changsheng to very naturally die at someone else's hand.

He had approached success quite a few times.

For example, when Eunuch Lin had wanted to sweep away the threats and hindrances that prevented the young emperor from holding power, he used the Tianhai Divine Empress's remains to make trouble. In secret, he had wanted to use the matter to kill Chen Changsheng, yet he had not succeeded.

For example, Xue Xingchuan's bitter misfortune and Zhou Tong as a lure had been meant for Chen Changsheng to strike out on his own volition, after which he would be killed.

"Unfortunately, none of them succeeded," Chen Changsheng said.

"I did not think that you had already understood all this, but it does not matter."

Shang Xingzhou's face was rather regretful. "If not for Wang Po, you would have died that day at Tie Shu's hands."

When Eunuch Lin suddenly attacked the Orthodox Academy, Chen Changsheng had already understood everything, but he still felt rather sorrowful over his master's regret.

Shang Xingzhou continued, "I swore an oath to your martial uncle that I would not attack, and the fact is that I never did. Neither Lin nor Zhou was an intentional plan on my part; it was all natural. If you persist in remaining in the capital, more and more such things will happen, and none of it will have one sign of my influence."

It was difficult to tell what was true and false in these words, but there was no need to tell.

Man's intentions were always drifting between true and false. Even if one saw all its varieties, one would still not be able to make out the distinction.

On the academy wall on the other side of the lake, ten-some blue-clothed Daoists appeared.

These Daoists all had unfathomable cultivations and an indistinct killing intent drifted about their sleeves.

Chapter 731 – The Black-Clothed Girl Walks Out of the Snow

"Does it really have to be this way?"

Chen Changsheng's gaze looked across the lake.

The existence of these blue-clothed Daoists was no longer a secret. Many people knew that they were from the eastern capital of Luoyang, from a once-obscure Daoist monastery.

"I said before that I have never made any plans," Shang Xingzhou replied.

Peaches and plums did not speak, but a path would form underneath them nonetheless. The height of the sun decided the angle at which many plants grew.

For a powerful figure like Shang Xingzhou, no actions or plans needed to be taken on his part, and there would naturally be many people willing to kill Chen Changsheng on his behalf.

This was because he had already made his stance clear through many matters.

Chen Changsheng drew back his gaze to Shang Xingzhou and asked, "Even if it's a war this time?"

According to the Pope's dying wish, he had come to the Orthodox Academy to engage in this important negotiation with Shang Xingzhou, so he had naturally made arrangements.

The Li Palace was heavily guarded, and the Orthodoxy cavalry was ready to charge in at any time. When those blue-clothed Daoists had arrived by the lake, Mao Qiuyu and the others had probably arrived as well.

Most importantly, he was the current Pope. If Shang Xingzhou insisted on killing him, he would inevitably stir up a conflagration that would destroy the entire capital.

"I have many supporters in the Li Palace," Shang Xingzhou calmly replied.

As the only Saint of the Great Zhou Dynasty, as the teacher of both the Emperor and the Pope, Shang Xingzhou already had an absurdly high reputation.

And he was also a member of the Orthodoxy's legitimate line, so he had every right to be master of the Li Palace.

Let alone the normal priests of the Li Palace, even some cardinals and perhaps even some of the Five Prefects would be willing to accept his descent.

However, the Pope's dying words and the means he had left behind were extremely unyielding, and the matter had already

been announced to the world, allowing the Orthodoxy to maintain its unity.

If Shang Xingzhou was truly willing to take this risk, even if he could not personally attack, he still had enough strength to forcefully kill Chen Changsheng in the Orthodox Academy. As long as the act was fast enough and caused a small enough stir, what might happen next?

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A snowstorm enveloped the capital and thus enveloped the Orthodox Academy. Together with this snowstorm, a dense mass of soldiers also surrounded the Orthodox Academy.

A girl walked out of the snow toward them.

She was dressed in black, her head slightly lowered. Her rather wide collar had become a black hood that obscured her face.

Miraculously, from the street to the entrance of Hundred Flowers Lane, not a single soldier had noticed her presence.

Only when she was close did the experts of the Imperial Court and priests of the Li Palace realize her existence through her footprints.

"Stop!" a person harshly yelled, either a general of the Imperial Court or a cardinal.

A major incident was highly likely to happen today, so the capital had descended into an extremely tense atmosphere. At this moment, a girl had suddenly walked out of the snow. Anyone would find it strange.

Upon hearing this voice, the black-clothed girl trembled. She continued to make her way into the lane, her steps even more hurried. She seemed rather scared.

Of course, this response could also be understood as arrogant.

"Are you seeking death?"

A sinister voice rose up from the shadows of the lane.

The buildings of Hundred Flowers Lane had already been leveled by the cavalry of the Imperial Court in the crises of the last few months. Only the shell of the tea house, which still had some commemorative value, remained standing.

Just as the girl walked past this building, that sinister voice spoke, followed swiftly by a cold and sinister sword glow as a shadow pierced towards her.

This sword glow was abnormally bright, yet it was unremarkable when mixed with the snow. Its sword energy was particularly frightening.

Even more frightening was that when this sword glow burst out, the shadow in the lane seemed to be exuding shards of starlight.

The Star Condensation assassin who had chosen to attack first was most likely from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets. As an expert that had just been subdued by the Imperial Court, they wished to prove their value as quickly as possible. Their encirclement of Chen Changsheng in the alley of the Northern Military Department had ultimately become a chaotic battle with no conclusion. Tonight, they did not want to miss out on another chance.

No could have imagined what happened next.

Nobody expected it, not the assassins in the lane, the experts of the military, the Guardians of the princely estates, or the Li Palace priests and experts of the academies at the end of the lane.

When the cold and sinister Qi arrived, the girl still had her head lowered, the face shrouded in the hood showing no reaction.

But then, the sword glow shattered into countless shards, vanishing into the night sky and truly mixing with the wind and snow.

The shattering here was a true shattering, as even the assassin's sword had shattered, causing the sword glow to shatter with it.

There were very few people in the world that could deal with a Star Condensation assassin, and as for someone who could shatter the sword of a Star Condensation assassin...many people had never even heard of such a person.

This was not the true conclusion, as after the sword glow shattered, another similar object also shattered.

The assassin shattered.

There was a soft buzz.

A smattering of pink suddenly appeared in the snow falling over Hundred Flowers Lane as if someone had poured several large tubs of paint over it.

Immediately afterwards, several dozen chunks of meat rained onto the ground. Only with careful examination could one make out that these were the limbs and organs of some human.

A gale of blood and a rain of limbs—all this had happened in a brief instant.

Only after this could people clearly make out the scene.

The black-clothed girl still had her head lowered, her face still shrouded in the shadow of the hood and difficult to make out. However, she had extended a single hand forward.

This hand was very small and white, like a snow lotus. However, it was currently dripping with blood, creating a striking and ghastly sight.

At her hand's current position was just falling snow, but it had previously been where the Star Condensation assassin was.

The dim lane was deathly still.

After a moment, several roars of anger mixed with shock rose up. An assassin from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets and two experts of the military transformed into three streams of snowy wind as they struck.

Plop plop plop. It was a sound like three ripe grapes dropping to the floor or three holes appearing in the ice.

These three streams of snowy wind instantly shattered.

These three experts of Imperial Court became three more rains of blood and shattered flesh!

No one could clearly make out what that girl had done, but in reality, she had done nothing at all.

She had just extended a hand into the snow.

The snow heeded her will to wipe out all that existed within it.

Then, she raised her head.

The black hood descended and her black hair fell like a waterfall, revealing the face of a young girl.

Her face was snow-white as if she had never seen the sun in her entire life. It was beautiful and elegant, but it also gave off an aura of biting cold.

Most striking of all were her eyes.

They had vertical pupils.

They were exceedingly monstrous and beautiful.

At this moment, her eyes were extremely perturbed.

There was reminiscence, unease, timidity, and also some madness.

This sort of eyes paired with her snow-white face stained with blood presented a most terrifying sight.

Suddenly, she stuck out her tongue and licked the blood on the corner of her lips.

This action made those experts hidden in the snow and the dark night feel a fear in the deepest depths of their soul.

This line is from the 'Records of the Grand Historian'. Its meaning is that though peach and plum trees do not intentionally draw people, their flowers and fruit result in people eventually treading out a path beneath them.

Chapter 732 – So She Thought (I)

The experts present were from the military, the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets, and the Department for Purging Officials. They had experienced countless life-or-death battles and seen countless wretched sights. Logically speaking, the most terrifying of scenes should not have made their hearts beat in fear, yet this black-clothed girl licking the blood on the corner of her lips made them feel an unprecedented fear.

Some people of weaker will even began to tremble. This fear surpassed all experience and rationality and originated from the very depths of their souls. It was like countless years before they had even been born, this fear had been branded on their souls in the realm above the starry sky.

The girl stood in the snow, her feet bare, her ankles dragging along two chains. She looked just like a prisoner and was very easily pitied, but right now, everyone at the entrance of the lane did not have the mind to notice these details. They had already been frozen into blocks of ice by her eyes and her display of power.

In that rain of blood and flesh, those eyes of colored glass, whether they contained madness or unease, reminiscence or fear, transformed into only cold indifference.

An indifference towards death.

This was far too frightening. Just who was she?

Many people had already noticed that this girl possessed a pair of monstrously beautiful vertical pupils. Could this be some great monster that had hidden itself from the world? Was it somehow related to White Emperor City?

Some people subconsciously turned to the middle part of Hundred Flowers Lane. Xiao De, the strongest expert of the demi-humans' middle generation, was currently there.

When these people turned to Xiao De, they were given yet another shock.

Xiao De was currently acting very strangely, as if he had been taken by some serious disease. His face was pale, and even in the late winter, he was constantly sweating. Countless streams of steam were rising up from his hair and leather gown and evaporating into the night sky, yet none of it could hide the shock and fear in his eyes.

As a great general of the demi-humans and expert of the Proclamation of Liberation, Xiao De naturally had confidence in himself. Even if he were facing off against the despair-inducing Wang Po who he had never once defeated, he would not have been frightened into this state...only when he had met the middle-aged scholar that was the Demon Lord by the stream in Mount Han did he have a similar reaction!

The crowd was stunned at this sight and once more called out a question in their minds.

Just who was she?

Everyone looked in horror at the black-clothed girl at the entrance of the lane.

Something unexpected occurred.

The girl suddenly bent over and began to vomit.

She was constantly vomiting as if only by vomiting out all the contents of her body would she finally feel comfortable.

After some time, she seemed to feel better and straightened her body.

But when she saw the mess on the ground, two red smears of anger appeared on her snow-white face.

She began to stamp her feet, grumbling about something the entire time as her black hair wildly danced around her. She looked just like a little girl that had been irritated or wronged and seemed very angry.

Her bare snow-white feet incessantly stamped on the snow, the chains constantly clinking.

Boomboomboomboom!

It was like thunder was constantly exploding in the lane. The snow shook and the world was uneasy. The cold air was incredibly compressed and then escaped into the distance.

An unimaginably powerful Qi appeared, tearing away at all things as she stamped her feet. Whether it was the softest snow or the hardest stone, whether it was the array just laid down last night or the old southern wall of Hundred Flowers Lane built three hundred years ago, it all fractured into the finest of pieces under this terrifying Qi.

The experts concealed in the snow and the darkness dared not linger. One by one, they were forced out and shot like arrows into the distance.

For a moment, the area outside the Orthodox Academy was filled with howls of air and panicked shouts.

After some time, the girl stopped stamping her feet. She stood with her head lowered, her chest slowly rising and falling.

The snow around the entrance of the lane had completely vanished, and the filth left by her vomit had also disappeared, leaving only the ground.

Ten-some deep cracks marred the ground, with hot air rising from all of them.

After venting her rage, she calmed back down. She was no longer

so angry, but when she saw the blood on her body, her monstrous vertical slits once more blazed with the flames of anger.

This time, without waiting for her to move, the experts of the Imperial Court once more flew into the air in escape, wanting nothing more than to fly straight out of the capital.

Even the experts of the Orthodoxy surrounding the lane from the distance subconsciously retreated several dozen zhang.

Fortunately, she did not turn insane again, but maintained her composure.

With a glance, the bloodstains on her body were frozen into a sheet of frost by an extreme cold and rustled down to the ground.

This seemed like a very simple action, but in the eyes of the Star Condensation cultivators in the darkness, it was miraculous.

To be able to drop the temperature so much in such a short amount of time, just how much, and how pure, star radiance or true essence would be required?

Even if an expert of the Divine Domain like one of the Eight Storms could do this, who would waste so much star radiance or true essence to clean oneself?

The crowd was stunned once more, and once more called out that question in their minds.

Just who was she?

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The black-clothed girl did not know what they were thinking, nor did she care. She was utterly unconcerned by their thoughts.

She walked forward into the lane, the chains on her ankles dragging on the ground behind her. Their clinking transformed into a thunderous boom.

The tea house that had accompanied the Orthodox Academy in its rise and fall, its ups and downs, and had witnessed many matches of the All-School Martial Exhibition, finally collapsed. The collapsing tea house was unable to send out any dust, because the moment it fell, a great snowstorm howled down from the sky and swiftly buried it under a thick layer of snow, covering the shattered stone and dust underneath.

She walked into the wind and snow, and the wind and snow gave way.

As a representative of one of the noblest and purest of bloodlines, as perhaps the only Black Frost Dragon that still remained on this world, she had always reigned over the wind and snow.

When she had climbed out of the abandoned well, she had not known where to go, so she had gone to the Orthodox Academy.

Of course, this was also because before the Green Leaf began to pull the chains from the stone wall, she had given her promise.

Though she had walked through the snow all the way from New North Bridge to here, she had never once felt cold. On the contrary, her cheeks were rather hot.

This was because freedom was truly a fine feeling, and it was also perhaps because she was going to see him as her free self.

But when she reached Hundred Flowers Lane, she felt unease and fear, because many people were hiding in the darkness.

These people could be considered experts of humanity. Although they were not enough to threaten her, they were quite enough to give her trouble.

But this had nothing to do with her unease and fear. She felt these things because...she was afraid of crowds.

Many, many years ago, when she journeyed from the warm seas of the south to this strange continent to seek out her father, she had once been surrounded by a crowd.

She did not like these human crowds to circle around her like ants. She found it rather disgusting, and it made her uneasy.

She felt that the explanation given by Chen Changsheng was quite correct. This was called 'ochlophobia'.

She found it even more annoying that whether she was flying in the air or walking on the ground, some people would always point at her and yell, shout, or cry.

She did not understand—she hadn't even done anything yet, so why were these humans crying?

Because they were weak and afraid? Then did that mean she should feel sorry for being strong?

So she thought.

Chapter 733 – So She Thought (II)

On the seventh night after her landfall, the girl had been ambushed by a treacherous silver dragon and suffered significant injuries.

In the following half-month, she was unable to transform into a dragon and could only walk on the ground. Since she had to interact with humans eventually, she could only suffer through it. If all those humans had done was wail and curse and point, perhaps she would have been able to endure, but when that rural scholar with the surname Zhou charged over with his swollen face while talking about removing the [four pests](#), she could no longer endure.

As a noble Black Frost Dragon, her most important trait was that she loved cleanliness, so how could she allow a man stinking with the smell of alcohol to approach her?

On that day, just like she had tonight, she had extended her hand.

Thus, that scholar surnamed Zhou died, transforming into a flower of blood.

The flower of blood that had bloomed those centuries ago had been even more beautiful than the flowers tonight, and the scholar surnamed Zhou had been shattered more thoroughly, transforming into powder that drifted away in the wind.

Perhaps it was because there had been no chains on her feet at that time.

So she thought.

In short, the scholar surnamed Zhou died. Later on, according to that thoroughly evil scholar surnamed Wang, he had even been recorded in the annals of his county, a hero praised by all the people.

Toward this, she had expressed her incomprehension and lack of interest.

The people of that county had later on formed ten-some volunteer armies to kill her, upon which she had effected a great slaughter.

The people of the county were all very disorganized, so their records were presumably also a disorganized mess.

So she thought.

But...it was truly very vexing when there were a lot of people.

Her memories in this aspect were truly unpleasant, so the moment she sensed that there were countless people around the Orthodox Academy, her first reaction was unease and then fear.

She used a hood to obscure her beautiful face and quickened the pace of her bare feet in order to hasten her entry into the Orthodox Academy, but she had been discovered at the entrance of Hundred Flowers Lane.

That assassin from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets had struck out of the snow in order to kill her.

This assassin didn't have much of a scent when compared to that scholar surnamed Zhou from several centuries ago.

But as a noble Black Frost Dragon, such an offense naturally required her to make a response appropriate to her status.

This response had even been faster than the speed of her thoughts.

It was to have this assassin executed.

The assassin from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets shattered, an explosion of blood and flesh that splattered to the ground.

She felt much more comfortable, and the fear of crowds in the depths of her heart was greatly dulled. Paired with this, the ruthlessness in her heart gradually increased. Soon after, she killed three more human experts. The ensuing rain of blood and death caused all her fear and unease to utterly vanish, and her ruthlessness stimulated her bloodthirsty instincts.

She instinctively licked the blood around her lips. She had originally thought that it would be sweet and tasty, but who could have thought that it would taste so nasty and repulsive? Was it because the continent was lacking in vigor, making humans much more unpalatable? Or was it...that the food Chen Changsheng had brought over the past few years had been too rich and changed her appetite?

So she thought, and then she was unable to suppress her disgust and began to vomit.

This situation enraged her, making her feel a great deal of resentment for these feeble humans and that Chen Changsheng who might have had ill intentions.

She began to vent her spleen like a wronged child. She incessantly stamped her feet, startling away the wind and snow, cracking the ground, and giving the entire world a fright.

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The wind and snow rose once more, and she walked towards the Orthodox Academy.

Her body was in no way large. On the contrary, it was rather petite. But as she walked, the space within Hundred Flowers Lane seemed to slightly deform as if it was unable to bear the load.

Blood slowly seeped out of the darkness, perhaps belonging to an assassin unable to escape in time or some soldiers that had been knocked out.

Those experts of the Imperial Court that had escaped into the distance felt that the terrifying Qi was growing more distinct, the formidable sense of oppression becoming real.

Xiao De's face had become extraordinarily unsightly, his pale face utterly devoid of blood.

He was far more susceptible to this Qi than human experts.

This Qi was clearly not fully matured, yet it seemed to come from the most primordial of winds, carrying with it the aura of an ancient era. To humans, this Qi was powerful and terrifying, but to demi-humans, this Qi crushed their souls and made it simply impossible for them to gather up any resistance or courage.

Xiao De's body was constantly trembling. Logically speaking, even if he was no match for the black-clothed girl, he should at least have attempted to halt her steps, but no matter how he attempted to move his true essence or forcefully transform, even trying a berserk metamorphosis, he could not gather enough courage. He didn't even dare to take a single step.

The innate oppression of higher-level creatures over lower-level creatures was truly too terrifying.

That he was still able to remain in the lane, was still able to remain standing and not kneel in the snow, was proof enough of his power and pride.

But this was still far from enough.

The girl had noticed the existence of this demi-human and turned to give him an interested glance. The moment her gaze touched his body, Xiao De's soul seemed to be scorched by some sacred flame. Fear surged out his eyes and he no longer dared to remain, instantly turning and vanishing into the darkness.

Not long after Xiao De vanished, a long sigh emerged from the darkness.

A hint of wariness appeared on the black-clothed girl's face.

Nothing happened, and after this sigh, there was not a single noise.

On the Bridge of Helplessness, around fourteen li away from the Orthodox Academy, Madam Mu, Empress of the Demi-humans, boarded her carriage pulled by Rainbow Deer and began her journey out of the capital.

By the lake within the Orthodox Academy, Shang Xingzhou turned in the direction of the Bridge of Helplessness.

He slightly arched his brows in surprise.

The departure of Madam Mu and the demi-humans' diplomatic mission signified that starting from this moment, White Emperor City would maintain its neutral position between the Great Zhou Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy.

Why had they shifted their positions so greatly? After all, such a shift was highly likely to affect the entire situation of the continent.

It was naturally because of that girl dressed in black making her way through the snow.

Unlike the proud and solitary Heavenly Phoenixes, the Dragon race had left many stories on the continent. To the demi-humans, the Dragon race that had not revealed itself in the world for many years was still their most deep-rooted source of faith, the object of their hopes. Moreover, the demi-humans' being able to establish a kingdom on the two shores of the Red River was said to be closely related to the Black Frost Dragons.

The Orthodox Academy's wall broke and the girl walked through it.

The ten-some blue-clothed Daoists stood in the snow, their arrangement seemingly disorderly but actually forming a nearly perfect array.

She could sense the power of these humans, and then she saw the middle-aged Daoist standing on the other side of the lake.

Though she had been imprisoned under the well of New North Bridge for several hundred years, she had still met quite a few of humanity's experts, like Wang Zhice, Qin Zhong, the Tianhai Divine Empress, the Pope, and Su Li. In reality, however, she only feared Su Li and Tianhai, because only these two would have dared to kill her.

Now, she sensed that there was yet another human that she needed to fear.

She was somewhat nervous, but she did not halt her steps.

She walked across the frozen lake and up to Chen Changsheng, cleared her throat, and said, "Greetings, I am your Protector."

The four pests are rats, flies, mosquitoes, and sparrows.

Chapter 734 – Protector

Before speaking, the girl had first cleared her throat. This made her seem very calm, like a rather witty child.

But Shang Xingzhou and Chen Changsheng were both able to hear the tremble in her voice.

This was not because she was excited to meet Chen Changsheng as her free self, but because she was uneasy.

She felt that she was too close to the middle-aged Daoist, that it was rather dangerous.

At this moment, she still did not know that this person was Chen Changsheng's master, but she could clearly tell that he had the ability to harm and even kill her.

The number of humans in this world that could harm and even kill her was very small, but she had managed to meet one on the same night that she escaped her centuries of imprisonment.

This made her feel a sense of defeat as if she was confronting fate, so much so that she did not even dare to look at Shang Xingzhou. She decided to just stare into Chen Changsheng's eyes, seeming particularly serious and focused.

She had no idea that in Shang Xingzhou's eyes, she was also an extremely dangerous existence.

Humanity had recorded very clearly in the Daoist scriptures that there was no such thing as being too vigilant against the Dragon race, the highest level of creature under the starry sky.

And this did not even take into account that she was a Black Frost Dragon, a member of the Dragon race with the purest and most powerful of bloodlines. Her tiny body was bursting with a power that human experts yearned for but could never obtain. If she could learn to use this power or if it were to just passively be used, it would certainly produce a terrifying energy and bitter consequences.

She feared Shang Xingzhou, Shang Xingzhou was wary of her, and Chen Changsheng was just shocked.

He had not expected that she was actually able to escape from the bottom of the well!

Even if the method he and Xu Yourong used was correct and his blood was currently quickening the pace at which the chains corroded through the refinement and urging of the Canon of Flowing West, it would take at least two years by his calculation for the chains to snap. Moreover, upon escaping the underground cavern, why had she not quickly left this continent filled with the scent of humans that she so detested and returned to her home in the warm archipelagos of the south? Why had she come to the Orthodox Academy?

Another variable had appeared in this negotiation, and it seemed

to favor him, but Chen Changsheng was in no way pleased. He wanted no one other than himself to participate in this negotiation, whether it was the priests of the Li Palace, the teachers and students of the Orthodox Academy, Mount Li or Scholartree Manor, or his concerned senior brother in the palace. Moreover, just what had she meant by those words?

'Protector'? Chen Changsheng recalled a related record from the seventh book of the 'Treaty of Light', and then he recalled the old matters that the Pope had inadvertently mentioned on that night.

Whether it was the Orthodoxy or the religion of the Way that preceded it, in order to preserve the Daoist teachings over the generations, they both regarded succession with the highest importance. The then-Popes would often begin laying plans many years in advance, teaching and nurturing their successors. Those young disciples would often be extremely talented in cultivation and possessed astonishing potential. However, for them to grow into true experts that could continue to lead the Dao ever forward, a long period of time was needed, for many trials to be experienced. Moreover, there were very few legitimate successors to the Daoist teachings. For instance, in the last generation, there were only the Pope and Shang Xingzhou, and in this generation, there were only Yu Ren, Chen Changsheng, and Mu Jiushi, who Shang Xingzhou had confirmed through some unknown method.

Given the long and challenging path of cultivation and the extremely small number of successors, it could logically be concluded that the succession of the Daoist teachings might have been snapped at any moment. Yet over the countless years, the Daoist teachings had been passed on through innumerable generations and had never once been severed. Other than those

successors' being extraordinary, like Yin and Shang, there was one other important reason. When these young successors were traveling the world and cultivating, the Daoist religion would often invite an extremely formidable and most venerable senior to act as Protector for a successor.

The Daoist teachings had continued for generation after generation without extinguishing, and this law had also persisted for many generations, even longer than the history of the Great Zhou Dynasty. If Chen Changsheng had lived in Xining Village's old temple with the identity of legitimate successor to the Orthodoxy, then he truly should have had a Protector, and this Protector should have been one of the strongest experts on the continent, probably one of the Storms of the Eight Directions. However, no one had known of his identity at the time, and now he was already Pope, so did he still need a Protector? And why was it her?

"So it was you that Yin spoke of."

Shang Xingzhou's expression was calm and unperturbed. It was plain to see that he had known of this matter beforehand.

He looked at the little Black Dragon and said, "After several centuries, you were finally able to leave that old well in New North Bridge and obtain freedom, so why did you not return to the Southern Sea?"

The Black Dragon stood in front of Chen Changsheng and seriously said to him, "Because this is the promise I made."

It was evident that Shang Xingzhou's presence was a massive pressure on her. Her small face was covered in anxiety, but she remained firm.

Shang Xingzhou suddenly asked, "You will protect him?"

She raised her face and very proudly said, "Of course."

Shang Xingzhou continued his questions. "Before the starry sky itself, are you willing to become one with him, to love, protect, respect, and comfort him as you love yourself? Are you willing to, in health and sickness, in wealth and poverty, in success and failure, always put his name before yours until you leave this world and return to the sea of stars?"

These words were like the slow wafting of the cool breeze and also like the unending crash of thunder.

These were some of the most ancient words in the scriptures of the church. This was the oath sworn by Protectors, a law of the Li Palace.

After a moment of silence, she answered, "I am willing."

Shang Xingzhou asked, "Even if you must pay your life?"

Without the slightest hesitation, she replied, "Yes."

Several years ago underneath New North Bridge, she had already paid to Chen Changsheng something even more valuable than her life, at least in her view.

Of course, this did not really mean that she was willing to die for Chen Changsheng with no questions asked, nor did it mean that she was unafraid of death. For a member of the long-lived Dragon race, death was something rarely considered. But it was precisely because their lives were so long that when they did occasionally think of death, they would feel a fear that far surpassed what an ordinary human would feel.

She stared into Shang Xingzhou's eyes and said, "Not even Wang Zhice dared to kill, only imprison me. I don't believe that you would dare to kill me."

In the general understanding of the cultivation world, the Dragon race was eternal. The reason for this impression that went against fact was primarily that the Dragon race was the highest level of being that existed under the starry sky, possessing an almost endless lifespan and unfathomable strength. Moreover, countless years ago when the Dragon race withdrew from the continent, they drew up a convention with all the worlds. This convention stated that any living being that offended the Dragon race voluntarily would die.

That this convention was passed down to this day naturally had nothing to do with how much demons or humans valued promises, but was because the Dragon race was powerful. Even the peak human or demon experts when confronting a lone and even weak

dragon would rarely do anything. This was because every dragon's body contained a Soul Pearl, and once a dragon died, the Soul Pearl would shatter. When the dragon's relatives in the south sensed its destruction, they were certain to conduct a most crazed reprisal.

Even when Emperor Taizong reigned over the Great Zhou Dynasty, he was not willing to bear such a price. When the little Black Dragon wreaked havoc over the land, Wang Zhice used a stratagem to entrap her, but never once attempted to kill her. Besides the fact that she had some forgivable aspects, it was more importantly because it was not easy to kill her and it was not a good idea to kill her.

For countless years, the Dragon race had always lived far away from the continent and yet had always been an object of reverence.

But in certain moments of history, the unexpected would occur.

Chapter 735 – Concerning Dreams, and Praising Fate

The unexpected occurred because some human or demon expert appeared on the continent.

These experts were far too powerful, so excessively powerful that the entire world was surprised by their appearance, and they looked down upon the Dragon race.

For instance, the legendary Demon Grand Scholar Tungus particularly enjoyed researching dragon blood. In his long and dull life, an uncountable number of dragons died in that laboratory of his, which never saw sunlight but basked in the moonlight year-round. His reputation was so terrifying that weaker Black Frost Dragons would fall from the sky in fright if they heard his name. Another example was the previous master of the Mountain Sea Sword, who had once fought several battles amongst the mountains and seas with evil dragons. It was said that the sea cucumbers harvested from that sea dyed red with blood were particularly valuable. There was also the strongest Black Frost Dragon in a thousand years that became friends with the Demon Lord of Xuelao City, but was ultimately transformed by Zhou Dufu into that mountain range within the Garden of Zhou.

And yet another example was the person called Su Li.

Back in the hot springs on the snowy plains, when the little Black Dragon saw Su Li for the first time, she was almost scared to death.

She could clearly sense that this person had killed many dragons.

Those people who dared to slaughter dragons were not necessarily fierce, as there was still the chance of failure. Only those who succeeded in slaughtering dragons could be called powerful.

Then what could a person like Su Li be called, someone who had journeyed especially to the Southern Sea to see how powerful the Dragon race actually was and had killed countless dragons with his sword?

Well, he had always been a surprise difficult to describe, an almost insane example that could not be understood with common sense.

The little Black Dragon did not know who Shang Xingzhou was, but she could sense that this powerful Daoist was also probably one of those unexpected individuals, so she had intentionally mentioned that matter from the past. Even if the vicious reputation of the Dragon race could not make her opponent retreat, the legendary name of Wang Zhice should make him feel some veneration.

Shang Xingzhou's response was very calm and indifferent, completely defying her expectations.

"The you in the rumors is very vicious. If a single word was out of line, you would eat someone. After you made landfall in the south, you transformed countless towns and villages into ruins." He

calmly looked at her like an elder looking at a naughty child as he indifferently continued, "But when I saw you at the time in Frost Flower Market, I knew that the rumors were not true."

Frost Flower Market was a very obscure place in the capital. Chen Changsheng only knew of it because that was where Mo Yu's Orange Garden was. It was otherwise very difficult for ordinary people to remember. But why could the little Black Dragon remember it? Several hundred years ago, it was there that she had been captured by the experts of the Imperial Court, where she had gasped for breath, void of strength. The small bridge there had been covered in a shallow layer of frost. That wretched scholar surnamed Wang walked across that bridge, his footprints like blooming flowers...

Perhaps this was the origin of the name 'Frost Flower Market'.

"You...met me back then?" The Black Dragon stared at Shang Xingzhou, the unease and faint fear in her heart transforming into an intense vigilance.

"Of course I met you before. The chains that Wang Zhice used to bind you were borrowed from me."

Shang Xingzhou's gaze moved down to her feet.

Those two chains at her ankles which seemed rather short, but were actually incredibly long, made a stark contrast against the white snow.

Her bare feet stood on the snow-covered ground as if she could not feel the cold, but when she heard Shang Xingzhou's words, she began to feel cold.

Shang Xingzhou continued, "This chain is a treasure of the Li Palace. Junior Brother was able to pull it from the wall, but he was unable to break it."

The Black Dragon and Chen Changsheng wordlessly glanced at each other.

Everyone said that time was the strongest and history was the heaviest, and now all this heavy strength lay within Shang Xingzhou's words.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets had passed, the Pope had returned to the sea of stars, the Demon Lord had fallen into the abyss, and Wang Zhice had secluded himself from the world. No one existed now who had the right to speak with him about the past.

From a certain perspective, he was history and time. It was just that he had not written his own name down all those years ago.

"My companions and comrades-in-arms have died one by one, and there's still one hiding like a ghost in the mountains, so I can no longer continue to conceal myself."

Shang Xingzhou looked at the pair and felt rather sorrowful. As if thinking about stories from long ago, he leisurely said, "Because we

are all Protectors."

Chen Changsheng understood his meaning.

No matter how much they schemed against each other and how cruel their plots, no one could deny that at the very beginning, Emperor Taizong and his ministers in the Lingyan Pavilion were dreamers through and through. They had offered their lives and spilled blood precisely for the sake of ending the chaos in the world, to drive out the demons, to act as Protectors for the continent.

Shang Xingzhou was not merely a witness to that magnificent generation, he had been a part of it.

He had originally been one of these dreamers. His name had not been conspicuous, but he had played an extremely important role. Emperor Taizu's alliance with the then-Pope, Emperor Taizong's ultimately obtaining the full support of the Li Palace in the coup of the Hundred Herb Garden, and those cruel stories of the Lingyan Pavilion had probably all involved him.

Those comrades-in-arms and companions had died, or been killed by him and Emperor Taizong, or had left. In short, after the long span of one thousand years, only he was left. Even if he was the only one left, precisely because he was the only one left, he had to bear the fate and responsibilities of his companions on his shoulders.

He wanted to become the Protector of the continent, to carry out

Emperor Taizong's dying wish, to realize the dreams of his companions:

Humanity united, the demons bowing in submission, and the world in harmony for ten thousand generations.

"No one can stop me.

"Nor should anyone stop me.

"Including you."

Shang Xingzhou calmly and firmly said to Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng didn't know what to say.

Just then, the cry of a crane resounded through the night sky.

A white crane had returned across vast distances from the south and answered for him.

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A wind blew past. It might have been very cold to ordinary people, but to the two humans and one dragon standing beneath

the great banyan tree, it was only chilly.

The snow over the lake was blown about, rustling like the dried leaves that had been buried long ago under the snow.

This starless night was still not cold or dark. This was because no matter how the court changed, the lights of the thousands of homes would always illuminate the world, just as they had done for countless years.

The White Crane carried Xu Yourong's letter expressing Holy Maiden Peak's fearless stance.

Madam Mu had departed on her carriage, expressing White Emperor City's stance.

The stances of Mount Li and Scholartree Manor did not need to be asked.

As for the crucial stance of the Orthodoxy, even if many people were willing to support Shang Xingzhou, just who would dare to blatantly oppose Chen Changsheng in the face of the Pope's final order?

After a somewhat oppressive silence, Shang Xingzhou spoke once more.

"Back when I first picked you out of the stream, I said that your fate was very bad."

He looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "Now it seems that I was wrong."

The young Daoist from Xining Village had now become the youngest Pope in history.

His sun wheel had been shattered in the womb, originally limiting his life to twenty years. Now his meridians had been rebuilt, his star openings were perfect, and the path of cultivation before him was level and smooth.

He had the support of the entire Orthodoxy, the support of many factions, and he also had a Protector.

Anyone could see that his fate was very good and worthy of praise.

What next?

Chapter 736 – Better to Not Have Met

In the past, Chen Changsheng's fate had been very poor. Later on, his fate had become very good. To put it another way, his fate had been changed.

On that night, at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, the Tianhai Divine Empress had defied the heavens and changed his fate.

From that moment forward, his path of cultivation was smooth and that shadow hanging over his head for ten-some years vanished, leaving only light.

Of course, as his fate and status changed, he encountered a set of new trials that he had never imagined. Even with the Divine Staff in hand, wanting to become the master of the Orthodoxy was still incredibly difficult. Fortunately, the Pope had made many arrangements for him before returning to the sea of stars, had already smoothed the road as much as he possibly could.

From a certain perspective, the Pope had also changed his fate.

For the sake of passing this grand inheritance into Chen Changsheng's hands, the Pope had made the most meticulous of plans. Not even mentioning the rainbow in the Li Palace and the figure that had vanished from the prayer mat in the Orange Garden, the starlight in the cavern below New North Bridge and those three green leaves were enough to see how much thought he had put into this plan.

The Pope had chosen the little Black Dragon to be Chen Changsheng's Protector for several reasons. Naturally, she was strong enough, as besides experts of the Divine Domain, few people on the continent could defeat her. The more important reason was her identity, because she was the princess of the Black Frost Dragon clan that had helped the demi-humans establish their kingdom countless years ago.

The White Emperor couple had probably known long ago that a Black Frost Dragon was imprisoned near the Imperial City, but they had never complained. Perhaps it was because that piece of history was too long ago, or perhaps it was because 'friendship' could never overcome 'worth'. The Pope did not care about their opinion. He rescued the Black Dragon for the explicit purpose of forcing White Emperor City to accept this favor.

Even if the White Emperor couple wanted to play deaf and mute, the tribes along the two shores of the Red River and their elders would not agree.

The Pope conducted himself like the cool breeze or the bright moon and was never much one to scheme or plot, but he was still someone that had lived on this world for a thousand years, so he had a deep understanding of the human mind.

And in this aspect, humans and demi-humans were no different.

He had calculated correctly.

The little Black Dragon had crawled out of the well of New North Bridge and walked through the snow to the Orthodox Academy.

Madam Mu had sighed and boarded her Rainbow Deer carriage to leave the capital.

Even now, Chen Changsheng was still unable to completely understand how much thought and effort the Pope had poured into this plan. He was too young, and even though he was well-versed in the Daoist Canon and knew many legends and stories, he found it difficult to connect them to the present. Thus, even after he heard what Shang Xingzhou had to say next, he needed to contemplate those words for a very long time before finally understanding what they meant.

"Do you know who Yin's Protector was?"

"I don't know."

"Chen Xuanba."

This was truly an answer that no one could have imagined.

In the past one thousand years, two names shone the greatest over the continent.

One was Zhou Dufu, and the other was Emperor Taizong.

But before Chen Xuanba died, nobody dared to claim that either Zhou Dufu or Emperor Taizong could dominate the world. In those ten-some years, an abnormally short period in the long river of history, he competed with those two in different areas, and in each aspect, he excelled and dazzled with astonishing talent.

This sort of person could be called unequalled throughout the world.

Even if the Pope had been a legitimate to the successor of the Daoist teachings back then, he still was not worthy of having a hegemon of the generation serving as his Protector.

Unless there was still some other secret behind this matter, of course.

"Chen Xuanba should be your ancestor. There is even a chance that you were made using the last drops of essence blood he left in this world, so Yin is settling a debt."

Shang Xingzhou asked, "Now do you understand his meaning?"

Chen Changsheng fell silent for a very long time, then nodded his head.

The Pope's love and pity could have come from many places. Perhaps he was settling a debt, or perhaps he was ashamed, or perhaps he had made a promise.

He had never seriously considered this before, but he had always understood the meaning behind the Pope's plans.

His master did not like him and wanted him to die, but this did not mean that he wanted his master to die.

This also meant that the relationship between him and Shang Xingzhou did not need to be one in which one had to kill the other.

If he remained in the capital, he would assuredly become the source of disorder unless he decided to lead the Orthodoxy in battle against the Imperial Court.

He would naturally not do this, as he could not find a single reason for doing so.

Did he really want to seize the throne from his senior brother?

As for evils...he was well aware that Shang Xingzhou had enough confidence to return his accusations with questions. The Imperial Court was newly established, so even if it wanted to commit evil, it hadn't even had a chance. The ugly evils at present were all Zhou Tong's, and no matter how much affection Chen Changsheng felt for her, it was appropriate to attribute the majority of Zhou Tong's evils to the Tianhai Divine Empress.

Chen Changsheng looked at Shang Xingzhou and asked, "And you, Master? Does Master understand Martial Uncle's meaning?"

Shang Xingzhou did not reply.

After his long conversation with the Pope on that night, and then when he saw the Black Dragon walk out of the snow, he came to completely understand Yin's meaning.

Just when had Changsheng become his heart obstruction? Perhaps it was also on that night in the Mausoleum of Books?

When he had picked that infant out from the wooden basin in the stream and sorrowfully said that his fate was bad, it was because he already knew the fate of this infant.

Before Chen Changsheng was even born, his sun wheel had been shattered, and then his body had been filled with an unimaginable quantity of Sacred Light by the people of the other continent, ensuring that he could never live past the age of twenty.

When he had spoken to Chen Changsheng about defying the heavens and changing fate, he had naturally been deceiving him. He had never once thought that Chen Changsheng could succeed in changing his fate, no matter how astonishing his talent. He had only had several years left between the time he left Xining Village and the age of twenty. Even if Zhou Dufu were reborn or Wang Zhice regained his youth, they could not have possibly accomplished such a feat.

Reality proved that his view was correct. By the night in which the coup of the Mausoleum of Books took place, Chen Changsheng was still unable to successfully defy the heavens and change his

fate, and was bereft of even a sliver of hope. He believed that Chen Changsheng would die, or be eaten by Tianhai, or reach the natural termination of his life. Yet unimaginably, Tianhai, taking everyone by surprise, took another choice.

If one said that this was a chessboard that he had laid down, Tianhai's death was the winning play. He thought that he had gained victory in this chess game, yet when he looked upon the chessboard, he realized to his shock that a piece that should have died was still standing on the board.

A chess piece that should have died was still alive, and the once-dull endgame had instantly undergone countless transformations.

This piece on the chessboard already seemed to have escaped the bounds of the board, a fact that deeply disconcerted Shang Xingzhou.

Thus, on the Divine Path in the face of the rising sun, he made a decision.

He needed Chen Changsheng to die as quickly as possible, for this chess piece to disappear as quickly as possible.

So on the Divine Path, he did not even glance at Chen Changsheng.

And thus, so many events took place in the aftermath.

Only after that long conversation did he begin to vaguely understand.

Because of this chess piece's relationship to him, because of the Dao that he cultivated, he had placed too much importance on the chess piece and wasted far too much energy on it.

Yin had spoken correctly.

Since both sides loathed each other...

Meeting was far inferior to not meeting.

Shang Xingzhou turned and began walking out of the Orthodox Academy.

Just like on the Divine Path of the Mausoleum of Books, he did not look again at Chen Changsheng.

Then ten-some blue-clothed Daoists followed him.

All of this happened too suddenly without the slightest sign.

Just then, a voice rose up without warning in Chen Changsheng's sea of consciousness.

"Walk a little farther.

"Do not let the capital see.

"Do not let the world see.

"Do not let me see."

Chapter 737 – The Sorrow of Those Chasing After the Sun

The voice belonged to Shang Xingzhou.

'Don't let the capital see, don't let the world see, don't let him see'...but what if he was seen?

Everyone knew that the unspoken consequence was undoubtedly related to death.

Chen Changsheng said nothing, only gazed at the snow falling in the night, his eyes bright and calm.

He also had a few words in his heart, and they were undoubtedly related to his return.

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Tonight's snow did not intensify, nor did its power lessen. The uncountable number of cavalry surrounding the Orthodox Academy were still warily facing off against each other.

Shang Xingzhou returned to the Imperial Palace. Those blue-clothed Daoists reverentially bowed to him, then took their leave.

He stood in the snow, gazing at the silhouette of the young emperor cast upon the window by the light, feeling a sense of gratification.

Everything had been worth it.

There was a rustling sound on the ground, the sound of shoes crunching against the soft and pliable snow. Priest Xin came up behind him and softly whispered a few words to him, his appearance very humble.

Though Mei Lisha had returned to the sea of stars, the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education still had no new master.

This hall had a very special status in the Orthodoxy and concealed an enormous amount of power, so it was not convenient for Mao Qiuyu to lead it. He had only led it as a temporary leader for a few months.

Many people believed that Priest Xin, who was deeply trusted by Mei Lisha and was also very close to the Orthodox Academy, was the best candidate for taking charge over the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, but his qualifications and seniority were somewhat lacking.

No one knew that Priest Xin actually had another identity as a secret agent for the Department for Purging Officials.

And no one knew that a few days ago when Zhou Tong had been hunted down and killed, the one that had plucked the array of the underground Zhou Prison and forced Zhou Tong out had also been him.

The reason was very simple. Priest Xin, who now had a bright future, would certainly be unwilling to continue serving as Zhou Tong's dog, so he hoped that Zhou Tong would die.

Of course, if he had not already obtained a few promises or guarantees, his courage would probably have arrived a little later.

"There will be no problems in the capital for the moment and the Li Palace will be without problems for three years. There is not much meaning in your managing the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education."

Shang Xingzhou continued, "Go to the south for me and see how Holy Maiden Peak and Mount Li are doing. Also, tell the Longevity Sect to send that object of mine to me."

Priest Xin was somewhat shocked, as he had no idea what the Longevity Sect needed to send to the venerable master of the Dao that would be so important. But he said nothing, accepting the order and very quickly vanishing into the snow.

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The snow that had accumulated on the lake had been blown away by the earlier wind, revealing the glossy layer of ice beneath. Under the illumination of the distant light, it appeared like a massive sheet of colored glass.

There were a few spots on this colored glass—the footprints that she had left behind as she walked across.

Perhaps because he was looking at this lake frozen into a sheet of colored glass, Chen Changsheng remembered a few things that were very important to her.

"Did you bring those Night Pearls and treasures with you?"

In the underground cavern beneath the well of New North Bridge, the ceiling had been inlaid with over a thousand extremely precious Night Pearls while the ground had been piled high with gold and silver.

They were the little Black Dragon's treasures, and they had also served as the greatest source of mental support in her centuries of long imprisonment.

Chen Changsheng was well aware of how important these things were to her, so he had brought up the matter.

"Of course I brought them with me."

The Black Dragon patted her stomach, exuding the aura of some hero that had just finished drinking eighty bowls of strong alcohol.

In her human form, she was very small, two heads shorter than Chen Changsheng. She looked like a girl of eleven or twelve, so this display of hers seemed rather amusing and also quite adorable.

Chen Changsheng knew that her black dress was her dragonscales and could not be parted from her, but it couldn't hold too much. Moreover, she had no spatial artifact, so he couldn't help but be very curious about where she had put all those things.

"You're so stupid." The Black Dragon was somewhat angry. She patted her stomach again and said, "I already said that it's all in here."

Chen Changsheng finally noticed that her stomach was slightly swollen like that of a child that had eaten too much.

It turned out that she had actually taken those thousand-some Night Pearls, the vast mountains of gold and silver, and the sea of coral...and swallowed it all.

At least he wouldn't have to worry about money for the next few years, but did that mean that she would have to spit it out every time he needed money?

Chen Changsheng felt that this was quite a filthy method, and then he very naturally recalled that besides spitting it out, there

was still another method. He instantly became uneasy.

"Cease your foolish thoughts!" The little Black Dragon very quickly reacted and roared, "If you continue to think such nonsense, I'll swallow you whole."

Chen Changsheng thought to himself, if you really do swallow me, you'll have to spit me out in the end, or use that other method. His face grew even more queasy.

The Black Dragon very quickly understood and her face turned even more unsightly than his as she slowly raised her fist.

This was a rather delicate fist, looking like a solitary plum blossom in the snow, extremely pitiful.

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Boom! A clap of thunder exploded in the Orthodox Academy. The ground shook and the snow on the great banyan tree rustled down.

Several cracks appeared on the frozen lake, with water appearing where the cracks intersected. In the floating shards of ice, the reflection of a person could be seen.

She grabbed this person and carried him off into the library.

In order to protect the books, the lights in the library were special and they exuded less warmth. Even a large quantity of these lights blazing for a very long time would be ineffective at drying soaked garments.

Chen Changsheng stood amidst several dozen of these lanterns, cold lake water constantly dripping from him onto the glossy black floor.

To be blown by a fist into the water, and thus thoroughly soaked and chilled to the bone, was a matter very worthy of being aggrieved and angry about.

He did not feel this way, as his body which had undergone perfect Purification was able to endure this sort of attack, and after his perfect Star Condensation, the normal heat and cold of the world was utterly incapable of encroaching upon his body.

Of course, the primary reason that he did not care was that the little Black Dragon was currently acting rather strangely.

Based on her personality, the black-clothed girl should have been quite pleased with herself, but now she was sitting across from him with her head lowered in dejection. He could even tell that she was feeling quite sorrowful.

"What's wrong?"

"My strength has gotten weaker."

"Perhaps...it's because you just escaped and aren't used to using it?"

"No."

She looked at the chains still tied to her feet and said, "If we can't find a way to break these chains, I might never be able to defeat your master."

Chen Changsheng realized that this was what she had truly been worried about and consoled, "Even if we did break the chains, you still wouldn't be able to beat him."

She was very angry and huffed, "Is this how you comfort people?"

Chen Changsheng seriously replied, "Yes, because this is an objective fact. When I was a baby, a Golden Dragon wanted to eat me, but it ended up being driven away by my master."

Amongst the Dragon race, the Golden Dragons and the Black Frost Dragons were the noblest and most powerful. Many, many years ago, when the Golden Dragon tribe had left the continent, it had been out of respect for the Black Frost Dragons. The Golden Dragon that he spoke of, based on Senior Yu Ren's description, had probably been one of the members of this tribe, and it might have even been part of their Imperial clan.

That Golden Dragon had naturally been many times stronger than the little Black Dragon, yet it had still been no match for his master.

In his view, there was truly no need for the little Black Dragon to be worried or sad about being unable to defeat his master.

Who would feel sorrow about not being able to catch up to the sun?

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Who would?

Of course, it would be those people daring enough, or perhaps mad enough, to chase after the sun.

Her gaze rested on the dagger at his waist.

When she first saw this sword, she had sensed that profound and familiar Qi that was worthy of either wariness or respect.

After hearing Chen Changsheng describe the events of the past, she was sure that this dagger was that Golden Dragon's third whisker.

To be able to defeat a member of the Golden Dragon Imperial clan and to even pluck out its most precious third whisker to use it as a weapon, such a person would have to be very strong and very confident.

From that moment, she came to know just how terrifying a human Chen Changsheng's master was.

If there was a chance, she naturally would not make this sort of human her enemy, but...

From this day forward, I am your Protector.

If that powerful human wants to kill you, I must think of a way to defeat him and kill him.

And so, I am rather sad.

It will eventually turn out that Priest Xin was working for Black Robe too /s

Chapter 738 – The Exiled Pope

Sadness was just an emotion and it in no way symbolized despair. The little Black Dragon lowered her head and looked at her trail through the snow as she began to ponder and calculate. That Shang Xingzhou had been able to easily defeat the Golden Dragon was naturally because he had the home court advantage, and he also must have made preparations in advance. How could she accurately assess his true level of strength through this battle?

Chen Changsheng guessed at what she was thinking and said, "You don't need to keep thinking about it."

The Black Dragon raised her head and stared into his eyes. "The Pope made me your Protector for a reason."

Both she and Chen Changsheng were unaware that the Pope had rescued her from beneath New North Bridge and made her Chen Changsheng's Protector primarily because of the complicated relationship between the Black Frost Dragon tribe and White Emperor City.

Upon hearing the term 'Protector' once more, Chen Changsheng fell silent. He suddenly asked, "Do you know who my master's Protector was back then?"

The little Black Dragon shook her head.

Chen Changsheng looked into the snow where that person had vanished, saying, "On that night, Martial Uncle told me...Master

didn't pick a Protector."

A strange light flashed across the Black Dragon's eyes.

Chen Changsheng continued, "Master believes that one cannot rely on external things when cultivating the Dao, nor can one rely on other people. Just relying on himself is enough."

The little Black Dragon said nothing.

This sort of person was far too frightening.

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After the black night was the dawn. The capital was still enveloped in a snowstorm as the continent welcomed a new year.

Many important events took place on the first day of the new year. For instance, the Great Zhou formally changed the era name, and the Li Palace welcomed a new master.

In the Li Palace's ceremony to celebrate the new year, something took place that shocked the entire continent.

According to the Pope's final decree and the Orthodoxy's

announcement that had already been promulgated across the entire world, Chen Changsheng was the new Pope.

Yet he did not appear in the new year's ceremony and his figure was not seen in the Great Hall of Light. Naturally, there had also been no enthronement ceremony. This news attracted all sorts of surprised discussion. Whether it was the priests of the Li Palace, the teachers and students of the Ivy Academies, or the common people of the capital, they all felt utterly perplexed and deeply uneasy.

In this time of confusion, the Li Palace issued an authoritative explanation.

The announcement contained the seals of the Five Prefects and Chen Changsheng's personal signature.

Because the Pope was too young, he had not cultivated for long enough. As such, he had decided to enter the world to cultivate, comprehending the Heavenly Dao amongst the red dust of the mundane world.

And when would he return? Nobody knew, and the announcement did not answer this. It was just written very clearly that the Pope could return to the capital at any time to ascend to the throne.

The Pope was not in the Li Palace but instead had concealed his name and entered the world to cultivate?

This was the first time such an event had taken place in all of history.

Shock and bewilderment flooded the entire capital and continent, so much so that many people did not even remember what the new era name of the Great Zhou Dynasty was.

After these emotions were slightly diluted by the passage of time, people finally had the leisure to turn their heads and recall the past year. Upon recalling all the things the previous Pope had done, they began to vaguely understand: all this had been a part of the previous Pope's plan.

If Chen Changsheng remained in the capital, it would deeply unsettle the Imperial Court, which would assuredly lead to a war.

If he left the capital, it would make the Imperial Court...to be more precise, it would let Shang Xingzhou feel much more at ease.

However, even now, few people understood why Shang Xingzhou was so wary of, so repelled by, so vexed by the existence of Chen Changsheng.

As Chen Changsheng had understood long ago and as Shang Xingzhou thought with sorrow last night in the snow of the Orthodox Academy, since the two loathed each other, it was better to not meet.

Give this master and disciple a little time, a little space.

Give the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy a little time, a little space.

Give this world and its millions of inhabitants a single chance.

There was no need for a war. This was not necessarily something that one needed to die for.

Chen Changsheng was still the Pope.

It was just that he could not remain in the capital, could not remain in the Li Palace.

Even if it would come down to two irreconcilable sides at the end, there could at least be a gap.

The problem could not be resolved right now, but in the future, perhaps both sides would have more wisdom to resolve this problem.

This was the plan of the previous Pope, and now it seemed like the best method to resolve this impasse.

Of course, the previous Pope's plan contained even more details that ensured that even if Chen Changsheng left the capital, the Li Palace could still safeguard its position.

This unprecedented situation had many extremely complex factors and circumstances, and perfectly embodied the previous Pope's intelligence and patience.

As his successor, all that Chen Changsheng needed to do was accept this arrangement and then continue to increase his intelligence, patience, and strength.

He needed to rely on his intelligence and patience to survive.

As long as he survived, he was Pope.

He would discuss it again once the mountains bloomed with flowers.

Not everyone could understand this matter, and even fewer could understand just how much thought and effort the previous Pope had put into this plan, or the resolve and daring the Li Palace had displayed. After all their shock faded, the reality that the people saw was very simple.

Chen Changsheng had become Pope, but he had been driven out of the capital.

Anyone could see that this was the Imperial Court's victory.

Many people believed that this result was because Shang Xingzhou did not wish for the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy to come to blows, nor did he wish to reject the Pope's final decree, so

he had expressed a magnanimous stance.

To be magnanimous was naturally to look down on someone.

Anyone could see that a Pope that could not be in the Li Palace was a Pope in name alone.

It was perhaps even a more dismal existence than being a Pope in name alone.

This was an exiled Pope.

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The Zhengtong era formally came to a close.

The Tianhai Divine Empress's reign over this continent had become a page in history, and a new page had been turned.

The Great Zhou Dynasty had formally changed rulers, the confluence of the north and south had been declared a success. As spring returned to the earth, countless matters became realized. At this moment, many cultivators had received imperial orders and were leaving the south to head north and enter various armies.

The Demon Empress had been executed, the Demon Lord was dead, Xuelao City was in chaos, and the Pope had bid farewell to the world. All things were changing from old to new, and the future of the continent was awash with light.

It was certain that humanity was about to welcome the finest generation since Emperor Taizong's.

No one knew that on a normal and unremarkable winter day, the newly appointed Pope Chen Changsheng left the Orthodox Academy.

He left Hundred Flowers Lane and mingled with the crowd. He walked along the Luo River, crossed the Bridge of Helplessness and passed the stone pillars of the Li Palace, exited the city gate, and left the capital.

In his bosom was a letter, tied to his waist was a sword, and in his hands was an umbrella.

A girl dressed in black walked by his side.

The girl was clean and charming, but her face bore no emotion, making her seem particularly cold.

She held a potted Green Leaf at her chest.

Chen Changsheng did not walk very fast, but as the girl was very small, if she wanted to catch up, she needed to walk faster.

As she walked, her black hair bobbed up and down in the cold wind. The Green Leaf at her chest also bobbed up and down with it.

This was not two oars bobbing up and down in the spring wind, but the appearance that she and this world should have had.

The part about two oars bobbing up and down is a reference to a famous Chinese children's song.

Chapter 739 – Let Us Go South

From the beginning of the new era, the entire continent was only concerned about one thing.

It was not the exiled Pope, not the closed-up Holy Maiden Peak, not Wang Po's return to Scholartree Manor.

This matter was far more critical than all the other matters added up together.

It was the invasion of the demons.

In the autumn of last year, the Demon Lord died, Nanke fled, the new lord took the throne, the demons fell into internal turmoil, and Xuelao City was soaked in blood. The weather was abnormally cold—winter had come early. The combined efforts of the wind and snow had resulted in an unusually poor harvest. Many of the smaller demon tribes had been forced to venture far away from Xuelao City, and the wolf cavalry so prized by the Demon Palace numbered only a third of their former numbers.

Anyone could see that this was the Demon race's weakest moment, and very few people could imagine that it was this moment the demons would choose to begin their invasion on a large scale.

To conduct things on a large scale indicated madness and a willingness to pay any price.

Perhaps the crisis of survival brought about by the blizzards and harsh cold had directly transformed into the demons' desire for blood. There was also another very important reason. It was that the once-Demon Crown Prince Han Qing, after guarding the Mausoleum of Books for more than six centuries, had finally left the human capital, passed through the vast snowy plains, and returned to Xuelao City.

According to an agreement made with Shang Xingzhou, White Emperor City used some secret method to get him into Xuelao City. There, he connected with a few members of the Council of Elders that had always been loyal to him. Through intelligence sent out of the Demon Palace, he once more confirmed that the one truly ruling the land of demons was not the newly ascended Demon Lord in the Demon Palace, but the Demon Commander and the enigmatic Military Advisor Black Robe.

He believed that although the Demon Commander and Black Robe had joined hands to overturn the rule of his father, the Demon Lord who had once terrorized the continent, this did not mean that they truly trusted each other. On the contrary, without that shadow in the sky, the trust between the two could transform into foam at any moment. They needed to remain vigilant of each other at all times, even prepare to attack the other. As for the young Demon Lord within the Demon Palace, he was just a pathetic puppet, a blade of grass buffeted to and fro by two cold winds. He was liable to get involved in their struggle at any moment and then die.

Han Qing wanted to use the tense relationship between the Demon Commander and Black Robe.

Because of their history, he could not work together with Black Robe, so just as it should be, he first contacted the Demon Commander.

He knew that the Demon Commander did not completely trust him, but he did not care. The person he truly wanted to ally himself with was the young Demon Lord.

That child was isolated and without help in the Demon Palace, probably living every day in fear. Right now, if he were to obtain Han Qing and the strength and support backing Han Qing, he would probably be wild with joy.

And they were brothers.

In retrospect, Han Qing's way of thinking was not necessarily wrong. It even might have been correct. Demons were not humans, and they viewed the world differently, but the two were fundamentally quite similar. In their end, they decided matters based on what they could gain, who they trusted, and the natural strengths and weaknesses of their relationships.

Han Qing failed because there had been a problem with his judgment from the very outset.

There really might have been a problem between the Demon Commander and Black Robe, but the young Demon Lord was not the helpless puppet that he imagined. In reality, only after he died did the entire continent come to know the main driver behind the

rebellion of Xuelao City was neither the Demon Commander nor Black Robe, but the young Demon Lord that had been pitied or disregarded by all.

He had truly been the one to seize the throne.

The Demon Commander and Black Robe had joined hands to push the once-domineering and invincible Demon Lord into the abyss precisely because of the young Demon Lord.

The Demon Commander and Black Robe truly would not trust each other, but they both had an incomparable trust in the young Demon Lord, treating him as their closest nephew.

Just how had the young Demon Lord been able to gain the trust, even loyalty, of both of them at the same time?

His father had once been this continent's most terrifying shadow. Even when Taizong and Zhou Dufu worked together, they could not completely eradicate him, and yet the young Demon Lord had personally killed him.

Just what sort of existence was the young Demon Lord?

He had placed his hopes of success on this true opponent, had wanted to use him to deal with an opponent that was more terrifying than he could imagine. There were no surprises. Han Qing was utterly defeated. Before he died, this demon who had guarded the Mausoleum of Books for six hundred years, unmoved

by any storm, could not help but raise his head to look at the throne.

A young and handsome demon was seated there, his lips perked up into a smile, perfectly diluting the noble and domineering aura exuded by a demon's body.

The young demon was the youngest son of the mighty Demon Lord, not much older than Nanke.

The deceased Demon Lord had many children. Han Qing had been the strongest, and Nanke the most famous, but no one could even remember the names of the rest of them.

Comparatively speaking, his name was actually well known. This was because he had been the young prince of the Demon Lord, but mostly because he had once said a certain phrase.

"I absolutely want Xu Yourong."

He didn't want to just meet her, he wanted her.

When these words spread across the continent, they naturally incited the limitless wrath of both humans and demi-humans, and also attracted a great deal of ridicule.

This was because at that moment, besides being a prince, he had nothing much to brag about.

Whether it was his talent in cultivation or the advancement of his demon body, his performance was very mediocre, inferior to Nanke and far inferior to Xu Yourong.

In the parties held by the demon nobles in Xuelao City and in the Orchid Creek Art Exhibition, he had obtained not one bit of fame. He wasn't even comparable to Chen Changsheng, let alone Qiushan Jun.

Until now.

Fire beacons were lit all around Xuelao City as the heads of countless nobles were severed from their bodies, green blood being shed for days on end.

Outside the Demon Palace, the wolf cavalry howled in their patrols and the buildings of the palace all bore the marks of a fierce battle.

His legendary eldest brother kneeled before him, covered in blood.

The Demon Commander and Black Robe stood quietly at his side.

He was at the very front.

He was at the very center.

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"Do you really think that you can keep their loyalty forever?"

Han Qing asked the young Demon Lord. He was naturally speaking about Black Robe and the Demon Commander.

"Elder Brother, all of you have lived for too long. When you think about things, you only think about loyalty, passion, trust, schemes...nothing but these dull, old terms. I'm very young, so I like more new and refreshing terms, like ideals, dreams, sunlight, warmth, spring...the south, and girls."

The young Demon Lord flashed a moving smile, then continued, "Their support has nothing to do with loyalty, but because we share common ideals, have the same dream."

Han Qing understood his meaning, and his face paled.

The seventh Demon General and the twenty-fourth Demon General stepped forward and dragged him out of the hall. The abyss behind the Demon Palace was waiting for him.

The Demon Army was about to move out.

The young Demon Lord walked out of the hall and looked upon the dense packs of wolf cavalry and the ever-roaring demon soldiers, then suddenly fell silent.

He seemed to be thinking about something rather absent-mindedly. After a very long time, he came to his senses and chuckled at himself.

Then, he said a few words that would become very famous in the future.

"The sunlight in the south is better, warmer. The spring is longer and the south has more girls, so let us go south."

Han Qing, you useless piece of shit.

Chapter 740 – The Cruel and Disorderly Mountains

Tianliang County was the most famous county on the continent. A thousand years ago, this place was home to the Liang Household, the Chen clan, the Zhou clan, and the now-destitute Wang clan. The last two dynasties to reign over the continent had both arisen from this county, and the county had been witness to an endless stream of experts, like those emperors, or Chen Xuanba, or Zhu Luo, or Wang Po.

With the establishment of the Great Zhou Dynasty, Tianliang County's status became even more unique, as it was now regarded as the ancestral homeland. Whether in taxation or administration, it received the best treatment. The Daoist church within Xunyang City also had the highest status of all of the Orthodoxy's Daoist churches. It also gradually began to encompass more land, eventually becoming the largest county or province on the continent.

On a map, the present Tianliang County looked like a dagger. Hanqiu City was the hilt, and Xunyang City was on the edge of the dagger. Above it was a vast territory of land similar to the body of the dagger.

This dagger was pointed straight at the north, the endless plains of snow, the territory of the demons.

Of course, the northernmost thousand-some li of Tianliang County were, excluding the ten or so forts and two army headquarters, sparsely inhabited and extremely desolate.

Humanity had never been able to establish effective control over this area, let alone flourish here, because this place was simply too close to the demons.

Regardless of the situation in the world, in the northern reaches of Tianliang County, the war between the humans and demons had not truly ceased for even a single day.

In the early spring of last year, the Demon Army began to move south, causing the situation here to grow even more tense, and even bloodier. The plains which had once been desolate and deserted were now covered in smoke and dust as uncountable numbers of cavalry charged against each other. Even in the sky, those flying carriages that were rarely seen in the capital and the vicious, strange beasts controlled by the demons clashed high up in the cold air like the callous eyes of a god.

The sound of fighting shook the sky as the cavalry of both sides charged at each other like two mighty floods, sending blood and Qi flying everywhere. In a very short span of time, an innumerable amount of human cavalry had toppled over and died. Similarly, many of the demons' most frightening wolf cavalry had been entrapped in the arrays set up by humans and torn into countless disgusting pieces of flesh.

Similar to their perspectives on life, the blood of the Human race and the Demon race were of completely different colors. Under the backdrop of the snowy plains, they made for a most breathtaking contrast, yet as more and more lives were lost, the red and green blood had no choice but to finally mingle. The corpses also began to pile up, and regardless of whether their deaths had been

glorious or nauseating, it was impossible to pry them apart.

As it was impossible to even separate the dead, those still alive were naturally squeezed together. The armies of both sides were difficult to distinguish from each other, now merged into a single black tide that completely engulfed the vast plain of snow. In such a crowded and intense battlefield, the arrays of both the Human race and the Demon race were forcefully torn apart by bloody Qi. Occasionally one could hear the anguished cry of an array master about to die as he suffered a backlash. Occasionally, a human cultivator or demon expert would soar into the sky, killing out a space in the black tide as they attempted to escape. Soon after, they would be drowned once more under the black tide and seen no more.

The occasional flash of light in the black tide was the explosive dispersal of star radiance. Every flash of light meant that a Star Condensation cultivator had died, his star radiance dispersing into the surroundings.

Even if Xue Xingchuan were reincarnated, Xiao Zhang stepped onto the field, or the gigantic figures of the Demon Generals in the depths of the snowy plains began to move, they would not have much effect on this sort of battle.

This was a war, desperate but extremely fair. The final outcome depended on every person that participated in this battle.

Of course, every person had to work together in order to have an effect on this war. The moment they separated, their effectiveness began to drop until it was reduced to nil.

Take, for instance, the small squad from the Mount Song Army that was making its way through the disorderly mountains to the east of the plain. They were on the verge of being completely annihilated, but such an event would have no effect on this war.

The problem was that everyone in this squad wanted to survive. Their lives meant quite a lot to them, so they had to continue fighting, even if they were clearly no match for their opponents.

This squad from the Mount Song Army was retreating from the battlefield not because they had deserted out of fear, but because they had received orders to evacuate a heavily wounded array master in advance.

Array masters played one of the most important roles on the battlefield. Spreading out an array required that one's sea of consciousness and star radiance form an inseverable connection with the array. This was very demanding on a cultivator, so even the most mediocre of array masters needed to be at Ethereal Opening. Moreover, the moment the array was broken, the array master would suffer the most terrible of backlashes. Thus, an array master was also a role on the battlefield in which it was very easy to die.

It was one of the most important roles, but also the one with the highest casualty rate, so it was only right that array masters received the greatest respect from soldiers, and were also placed under the greatest protection.

In order that the heavily injured array master could receive treatment as quickly as possible, this squad of the Mount Song Army had paid a most bitter price. In reaching these disorderly mountains, thirty soldiers had dwindled to fourteen.

They were being pursued by five wolf cavalry.

Rocks were sent flying, the ground shook, and dust flew into the air. The wolf cavalry had once more appeared before them.

The wolf cavalry were the most terrifying of the demons' troops. Their mounts were a sort of blood-drinking wolf that lived on the snowy plains and had enormous bodies and fur like iron needles. They possessed amazing speed and ruthless temperaments.

With a spray of rocks, five wolf cavalry burst out of the dust and surrounded the fourteen human soldiers.

These bloodthirsty wolves were around a zhang high, and the demons mounted atop were horned, their bodies covered in scale armor, their eyes a gloomy green. Their mouths, which were shaped like '人', dripped with stinking saliva.

Compared to the demon nobles that lived in Xuelao City, these demon soldiers were much more ugly and much more terrifying.

This was the true appearance of lower-level demons, and this was what demons looked like to humans.

The lowest level of demon soldiers could still resist against a human that had succeeded in Purification, but these were not the lowest level. These were the elite wolf cavalry.

Surrounded by five wolf cavalry, there was no path of retreat. The human soldiers were filled with despair, but no one surrendered. Instead, they tightened their grip on their weapons.

In the war between the Human race and the Demon race, rarely were people captured, and rarely did people surrender. The reason for this was very simple: demons did not have a habit of accepting surrenders.

From a certain perspective, the natural ruthlessness of the Demon race was a benefit to the humans, because they did not need to worry about desertion or betrayal.

It was precisely for this reason that many people had found it impossible to believe that the Mount Li Sword Sect's Liang Xiaoxiao would collude with the demons.

The battle began and was very quickly decided.

Although this small squad of the Mount Song Army could be said to have perfectly demonstrated the results of their arduous training, attacking and defending with sublime coordination, they were still no match.

Violent waves of Qi spread out, permeated with the scent of

blood. The hard rock of the mountains was scored by the claws of wolves.

The first exchange had lasted for a few seconds, and three human soldiers had died.

The demon soldiers had also paid a price, but it was only that one of them had their horn cut off.

The cold wind stirred up the dry snow and covered the scratches left by the wolf claws.

The demon who had had his horn cut off was furious. He let off a series of enraged howls, then lifted the human corpse in front of him with his spear.

With a rip, the corpse of this human soldier was torn in two.

Blood rained down.

The demon soldier grabbed the upper half of the corpse, brought it to his mouth, and slowly began to chew on it.

The lower half of the corpse did not fall to the ground, but instead was taken up in the mouth of his wolf mount.

Kakakaka. In the deathly stillness of the mountains, the only sound that could be heard was that of bones being gnawed apart.

Blood dripped from both the demon's mouth and his mount's, falling onto the ground.

Chapter 741 – The Bellowing and Disorderly Mountains

The war between the demons and humans arose from their struggle for the continent, but the two sides' fight to the death was closely related to a certain matter.

Demons ate humans.

This was the Human race's greatest fear and cause for anger, and also the greatest source of their courage.

In truth, regardless of the era, humans had never been the primary food for demons. At the very beginning, demons ate humans as if to express the traits of a more savage era, and they did so to mystify their battles, strengthen their bodies, flaunt their power, and frighten their enemies. However, with the passage of time, this action gradually became a habit for the demons.

Later on, this terrifying conduct no longer had the effect on the demons that it used to, and the frightening effect it had on humans had mostly transformed into resentment and courage. From every aspect, this conduct brought no benefits to this war between the humans and demons, only negative effects.

The more intelligent of the demon soldiers had long since come to recognize this fact. However, breaking a practice that had become a tradition would inevitably face all sort of opposition. Moreover, to the demons famed for their cruelty, any sort of blood-soaked and terrifying matter was a pleasure most welcomed

by them.

After many years of debate, the eternally famous Grand Scholar Tungus researched this practice for twenty years. Ultimately, after analyzing this practice through a theological and social perspective and weighing the merits and drawbacks biologically and mentally, he passed judgment. In his work, the grand scholar explicitly stated that eating humans offered no benefit to the advancement of demons. On the contrary, the human body contained certain material that would contaminate the brain stem of demons, ultimately causing demons that had eaten too many humans to go crazy and inflict harm upon themselves until they died. At the same time, Grand Scholar Tungus also expressed his callous disdain for this practice from a theological perspective, determining that this practice was blasphemy to the Moon God.

In Xuelao City, Grand Scholar Tungus's research naturally faced no opposition, just like every other subject he had researched. As for that other grand scholar of the generation who had the right to question him, the Pope in the south, there was also no voice of objection.

Perhaps precisely because this silence was too stark a contrast with the fierce quarrels the two had engaged in in the past, it attracted all sorts of private rumor and discussion. Some demon scholars suspected that there was a problem with Grand Scholar Tungus's argument, while the scholars of the Li Palace secretly proposed an even more outrageous possibility: this work of research on the effect of demons' human-eating was highly likely to be a joint work between Grand Scholar Tungus and the Pope! At the very least, the Pope must have greatly assisted in it.

If these doubts were true, there was naturally something wrong with this research; perhaps it was even completely fabricated. But just as was mentioned before, the Imperial clan and the nobles of Xuelao City put up no opposition to Grand Scholar Tungus's judgment, and the Pope within the Li Palace also maintained his silence, so who would dare voice their doubts?

As this work was circulated, the popularity of the practice of human-eating gradually waned. Finally, one thousand years ago, that Demon Lord who dominated the continent finally banned the practice. From that moment on, eating humans was completely banned in the Demon race's territory, especially in Xuelao City, where such actions basically ceased to occur.

But the strength of tradition was far too powerful, the snowy plains of the demon domain too vast, the gap in intelligence and culture between the various levels of demons too great. Even mighty existences like Grand Scholar Tungus and the Demon Lord could not cause this practice to completely disappear. The lower-level demons in the small tribes would still sneakily eat human meat, even consider doing so an honor. In the past several hundred years, just how many human bodies had vanished from the battlefield? And amongst the several dozen Demon Generals, just how many had not tasted human flesh?

Now, with the passing of that Demon Lord, and the increasing bitterness of the war between the humans and demons, the binding effect of this ban had received a terrible blow.

In this remote region of the snowy plains, cruel sights such as this occurred all over the place, like right now amongst these

disorderly mountains.

The demon soldier and his wolf mount were incessantly tearing into the body of the human soldier.

Blood dripped from their mouths and fell on the hard and cold ground.

Finally, someone's will broke at this sight. With a lament, he threw down his weapon and retreated back down the mountain path. However, before he could get very far, one of the wolf cavalry guarding the southwest direction caught up to him. With a brief cry of misery, he became a pile of mangled flesh and blood.

Every day on the battlefield, the Human race would receive such a bloody lesson.

Only with their companions was there a hope of survival. Escape and betrayal were the same as death.

Fear and anger were born together, so when this soldier ran off in panic, the remaining ten soldiers became extraordinarily angry.

Anger was the greatest source of courage. The soldiers tightly gripped their weapons once more and roared at the wolf cavalry.

The leader of this squad was an old soldier who had succeeded at Purification many years ago. He had abundant experience on the battlefield, so he was much calmer than all of his subordinates.

When the cries of misery and angry bellows were rising up together, he was still observing the surroundings, judging the present situation and thinking of a way to escape.

His gaze rested on the stretcher and he silently gave his apologies. His squad was doomed to be completely wiped out, as he would be forced to use his last two resorts. But even if he succeeded, not a single survivor would remain. At that time, the array master on the stretcher would either freeze to death or starve to death. Regardless, it would be a very wretched end.

Array masters were the most respected and most welcomed of individuals on the battlefield. It was no surprise if they died in battle, but they should not have such a dismal end as this.

Moreover, this array master was very young.

The lowest level of array master had to be at Ethereal Opening, so they were normally rather old.

The array master was very dark-skinned and very thin. Though his face was covered in blood, it was still possible to tell that he was young.

Such a young array master was an extremely rare sight even in the Mount Song Army headquarters, let alone amongst the ranks of the armies engaged in battle.

Such a young array master was assuredly most gifted. As long as he could survive, he was guaranteed a beautiful and boundless future.

The squad leader understood that it was probably for precisely this reason that his superior had, despite the ferocity of the battle, ordered them to evacuate this array master.

Regretfully, the wolf cavalry that they had been battling with had probably also realized this fact, so they had not hesitated to harm their own fighting power and send several wolf cavalry in pursuit.

Seeing the wolf cavalry charging, seeing his subordinates resolved to die, the squad leader threw down his sword and took out a magical artifact from his belt.

This magical artifact exuded a faint Qi that seemed to communicate with a certain object beneath his clothes.

The soldiers also seemed to sense something and turned their heads to him.

He opened his mouth, planning to say something.

The soldiers guessed at what he intended to do. Their faces paled, and one young soldier went red in the eyes, not out of rage, but sorrow.

There was no time to persuade or comfort. The demons and their wolves were already upon them, the stench assailing their nostrils.

The disorderly mountains bellowed in rage.

The human soldiers struck back against the wolf cavalry. No matter how sharp the teeth of these strange wolves, no matter how powerful the spears of the demon soldiers, the humans charged!

As they charged, not a single one of them turned to look back at him.

Blood spurted and limbs flew. In an extremely brief amount of time, the human soldiers were all killed. Of the wolf cavalry, two of them received light injuries.

The corpses of the soldiers lay collapsed in the claws of the wolves or hung from the spears of the soldiers as they were snacked upon. This was an abnormally gory and horrifying scene.

The demon soldiers cackled at the final human.

Unable to comprehend their words, he shattered the magical artifact in his hands.

Chapter 742 – Embers and Cold

As the magical artifact shattered, a strand of Qi emerged from the squad leader's hand, spreading with remarkable speed across the entire cliff.

The corpses of the human soldiers, whether on the ground, or on the spears of the demon soldiers, or in the mouths of their wolves, responded to this Qi, and a weaker Qi, almost like a scent, emerged from their bodies.

This Qi was like an invisible flame that was now igniting a long-hidden kindling.

The demon soldiers seemed to sense something, and a smear of shock appeared in their green eyes. With a set of sharp shouts, they waved their spears to cast those human corpses far away, at the same time jerking on the leather reins around the necks of their wolves, intending to turn and retreat.

But it was too late.

These strange wolves were very dimwitted and had no inkling of what was going on, so they were somewhat unwilling to throw away the human corpses in their mouths. At this moment, a bright yellow ball of light emerged from the deceased humans. Simultaneously, more balls of yellow light lit up all across the cliff.

Boomboomboomboom!

Terrifying explosions rumbled through the mountains like claps of thunder. Then a fire began to blaze, almost instantly transforming the area into a sea of flames.

The hard rock was exploded into chunks and then melted by the blazing flames into lava that splashed onto the demon soldiers.

The wolves met an even more miserable fate. Their heads were immediately blown to bits, transforming into mangled piles of flesh and meat bearing no resemblance to their original appearance.

Howls of misery continuously rose up from the disorderly mountains, but they were unable to pass through the sea of flames and surging waves of Qi, and quickly died away.

Just like this, the demon soldiers and their wolf mounts died.

The surging waves of Qi carved out a smooth slope on the mountain cliffs before mixing into the heavens and earth.

The sea of flames, however, persisted for a very long time as the flames gradually lost their energy.

The squad leader released his hold on the scorched black item on his forearm that was once a small shield, and began to slowly crawl to the back.

His right arm had been completely destroyed by the explosive might of the magical artifact and his chest was also a bloody mess, with bones faintly visible. He had suffered severe injuries, but he was still not dead.

Before he died, he still had one task that he had to complete: killing the array master.

He deeply respected the young array master, who would assuredly have had the best prospects if he survived, and such an outstanding human should not be frozen or starved to death. And also...the day before yesterday, he had received an order. By no means could he let this young array master fall into the hands of the demons. If it was necessary, he could kill him.

With some difficulty, he crawled up to the stretcher. As he gasped a few tired breaths, he looked at the young array master on the stretcher with a rather complex and sorrowful expression.

The magical artifact he had used to kill the five demon soldiers had naturally been no ordinary magical artifact, but a very strange sort that was more similar to an array. This sort of magical artifact that used the power of an array was extremely rare, and its method of use was excessively cruel. The Great Zhou Army had essentially never used them before.

It was said that this set of magical artifacts came from the Wenshui Tangs. He could possess this sort of magical artifact because he was the general's trusted subordinate, and also because the small squad of the Mount Song Army that he led was often entrusted with very important missions, like protecting or killing

this young array master.

Even at the moment of their deaths, the soldiers under him never knew that this magical artifact had been planted in their bodies long ago.

When he thought of the order the general gave to him before the battle, the squad leader revealed a rather perplexed expression.

For this person, the important figures of the Mount Song Army had clearly made many arrangements in advance, even preparing to bury this small squad.

"Just who are you?" he muttered to the unconscious young array master on the stretcher.

Before he killed this person, he had a deep desire to know his name and surname. Perhaps it was only this way that he could feel a little consolation.

Regretfully, this person had suffered a backlash on the battlefield and been severely wounded. It was utterly impossible for him to awaken and answer his question.

He laboriously pulled out a dagger, aimed it at the young array master's throat, and then closed his eyes. After taking a deep breath, he pushed down.

But he did not hear the sound of the throat breaking, nor did he

feel the dagger puncture through flesh.

He opened his eyes and saw to his astonishment that the dagger was being clutched between two fingers, utterly incapable of pressing forward.

Even more astonishingly, these two fingers belonged to the young array master.

At some point, the array master had awakened and opened his eyes, and was now quietly watching.

His eyes were very cold, completely devoid of emotion. They were like the ice covering these mountains, but there were bloodstains beneath this ice that exuded a faint stench of blood.

The squad leader came to his senses and felt an inexplicable fear upon looking at the array master's eyes.

The young array master lightly flicked his fingers, taking the dagger, but doing nothing after that.

The squad leader quickly explained what had just occurred.

The young array master seemed to be in deep thought.

The squad leader had no more strength. Exhausted, he sat on the ground and said in gratitude, "You're still alive, so the deaths of my

brothers will not have been wasted."

The young array master's voice seemed particularly cold. "Do you really think that any of you pieces of trash can decide whether I live or die? I just didn't want to act."

"What?" The squad leader froze, not daring to believe what he had just heard.

What did this mean? After spending a few moments in amazed stupefaction, he became furious, pointing at the burned corpses on the cliffs and wanting to reprimand the array master.

The young array master did not give him a chance. A terrifying Qi emerged from those cold and cruel eyes, instantly jolting him to death, transforming him into a blood-covered corpse. Then, this corpse began to blaze from the remaining flames left behind by the magical artifact, producing an unpleasant smell.

"Regardless of whether it was out of kindness or to carry out an order, you still attempted to kill me."

The young array master apathetically stared at the burning corpse and declared, "So you needed to die."

The howling of the cold wind gradually extinguished the embers on the cliff, dispersing those mixed and unpleasant scents.

The demon soldiers and their wolf mounts had been at the very

center of the attacks of ten-some magical artifacts, and they were burned by a sea of flames. The only thing that remained of them was a rough outline, and it was impossible to make out their original appearances. Then ten-some bodies of the human soldiers were also in an awful state. In short, it was a dismal scene, a cruel environment.

But the young array master did not leave, instead lying back down on the stretcher.

He closed his eyes as if unable to see the hellish mountainside, unable to smell the charred bodies, unable to feel the chill of the wind. Just like that, he fell asleep.

Chapter 743 – The Medicine's Name

Four days after the conclusion of the massive battle, the headquarters of the Mount Song Army was still frigidly cold, but the scent of blood had greatly weakened. It was no longer possible to see the tense sight of several hundred soldiers carrying stretchers while running and yelling, or the divine sight of ten-some streams of Sacred Light simultaneously lighting up the night sky above the Sacred Hospital.

Many white plumes of smoke rose up from the area around Mount Song, drifting up into the sky. When people in the headquarters saw this sight, they would stop and mourn, for each white plume of smoke represented a soldier that had died in battle. Based on the initial counts, the number of soldiers sacrificed by the Great Zhou in this military campaign already exceeded ten thousand, and this was not counting the workers in charge of logistics and the cultivators that had come from various areas to offer assistance.

However, the mood of the Sacred Hospital was no longer as tense as it was a few days ago. The great majority of those injured had had their wounds brought under control, and those who were untreatable had been carried out long ago. But for some reason, the room at the very back was still packed with people and the mood there was particularly fraught with worry.

"I won't listen to a single explanation; I just need all of you to save him."

The general's face was extremely grim, his tone incredibly

unyielding, and when his gaze rested on the bed, his voice was tinged with hints of ruthlessness.

The wounded person on the bed was very young. Judging by his clothes and the cloth bag tied to his waist, he was probably an array master. His body was thin, his skin a light shade of brown, but now it was white as snow, a clear sign that he had lost too much blood. His lips were flaking and his breathing was extremely weak. It seemed like he could die at any time.

Upon hearing the general's order, everyone in the room felt a massive pressure, at the same time feeling rather confused.

Such a young array master must have come from a very famous sect and possessed limitless prospects, but this general was a trusted aide highly regarded by Divine General Ke and had a lofty reputation in the Mount Song Army headquarters. With his incredibly high status, there was no need for him to throw such a large fit over a single wounded array master. Besides the military doctors, there were even two people from the Orthodoxy present to treat this young array master's injuries.

The general knew what these people were thinking, but he gave no explanation.

He had a vague understanding of this young array master's background, but this was not the reason for his fury and anxiety.

Right before coming to the hospital, he had received a dossier reporting on the results of the investigation into what had

happened.

Besides this young array master on the bed teetering on the edge of death, no one knew just what had actually happened on that cliff. However, the soldiers who had personally witnessed the resulting scene on that cliff were very sure that it had assuredly been an extremely heroic action, because what they saw was extremely tragic. Ten-some soldiers had used the magical artifacts constructed in secret by the Wenshui Tang clan and blown themselves up, bringing five wolf cavalry with them into death. Moreover, on the path of retreat along the cliff, they had discovered the corpses of ten-some more soldiers.

This most elite squad of the Mount Song Army, made up of brave and daring soldiers, had sacrificed themselves just so that this young array master could survive. Thus, if he did not save this array master, how could he soothe the souls of his deceased subordinates?

"I will not give a single explanation, because I truly do not have the ability to save him."

A woman dressed in white ceremonial clothes stood up from the bed, her clear and beautiful face covered in exhaustion, the pure and gentle Sacred Light gradually dispersing from her slender fingers.

The general was silent.

This woman was from the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green

located in the capital and was called An Hua. She had arrived at the Mount Song Army headquarters two days ago and begun to work without rest, attempting to rescue the casualties on the battlefield. If it were not for the fact that the Mount Song Army headquarters had sufficient reserves of crystals to help her meditate and recover, there was a high chance that she would have already died from wringing her body dry of Sacred Light.

No matter how disastrous or anxious the general's mood, he could say no harsh word to her.

And he could very clearly see that she had already given her all in order to save the young array master on the bed.

The general turned to the chief cleric of the Sacred Hospital.

The cleric almost imperceptibly shook his head.

The doctors from all the hospitals in the area were unable to do anything for the array master's injuries. Was the Sacred Light technique of the Li Palace clerics and the teachers of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green unable to save him as well?

The general's mood had reached its lowest and he could no longer control himself. He pounded his fist against the table.

The atmosphere in the room was extremely depressed. One person took off his hat, intending to begin grieving.

It was at this point that a military doctor in the corner sadly remarked, "It would be fine if we had a Cinnabar Pill."

The name 'Cinnabar Pill' seemed have a magic power, plunging the room into an almost deathly stillness. The only sound was that of breathing that was gradually growing more rough and hurried.

A few people's eyes suddenly glowed with joy, yet upon realizing something, quickly dimmed again.

Just as expected, the chief cleric sighed and said, "On the first day of the campaign, we used up our allotment."

The general was well aware of just how many heavily wounded soldiers had been sent back from the battlefield on the first day of the campaign. From the very start, he had placed no faith in this pill, but when he heard someone mention the name again, he could not help but cling to this final hope and asked, "When will the next lot be distributed? Can he possibly hold on until that day?"

The cleric shook his head. "The next distribution of the pills is in ten days, but with his injuries, he will only be able to last for five days at the most."

An Hua had been studying the Sacred Light technique in the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green until now. When the war with the demons began, she had placed all her efforts on cultivation so that she could head to the frontlines and treat the injured as quickly as possible. Thus, she had paid no attention whatsoever to the affairs of the outside world. Taken together with the fact that

she had only arrived at the Mount Song Army headquarters two days ago, she was completely perplexed by what everyone was speaking about.

"What is the Cinnabar Pill? A type of medicine?" she asked the cleric.

From its name, one could guess that its primary ingredient was cinnabar, which truly could be used in medicines to help staunch bleeding. But this young array master's injuries were so serious that even her Sacred Light technique had no effect. In her view, perhaps if several cardinals worked at the same time there was some hope. Could this medicine possible have a similar effect?

The cleric understood what she was thinking and answered, "The Cinnabar Pill can cure this person's wounds."

One by one, everyone else nodded, none of them holding the slightest doubt. After witnessing the Cinnabar Pill work for themselves, they all had the feeling that the Cinnabar Pill could cure all the injuries and illnesses of the world.

An Hua had never even heard of this medicine, so she was even more perplexed by their fervent faith.

"If it...really will work, why aren't we trying it as quickly as possible?"

The cleric ruefully sighed. "Where could we possibly find this

sort of treasure?"

Everyone present thought of the saying going around that this medicine could only belong in the heavens, and said nothing.

The general said to An Hua, "This medicine is very rare."

An Hua was still confused, asking, "If this medicine really does have such a miraculous effect, why not have the herbalist give out the recipe and then have the Imperial Court or the Li Palace produce it in mass quantities?"

The room fell silent once more.

Everyone was looking at her, seemingly rather nervous.

No one answered her question.

It was like the entire Sacred Hospital had fallen silent.

There was not a single sound.

It was like she had asked about a taboo.

Chapter 744 – The Medicine's Significance

The Sacred Hospital was utterly silent—not even the sound of breathing could be heard within the room at the very back. It was even possible to hear that someone was intentionally holding their breath. A few people lowered their heads, a few people nervously looked around, and the atmosphere was oppressive and tense as if someone was spying on this place.

In this tense atmosphere, a person was finally unable to suppress a cough. The general glanced at this person, then asked, "Ten more days?"

This question somewhat lightened the mood in the room.

An Hua walked with the cleric to the window and whispered, "Just what is going on here?"

The cleric responded, "No one can have the herbalist give out the recipe, because up to now, no one even knows who's been making this medicine."

An Hua was so astonished at this answer that she forgot about the strange mood pervading the room. In a somewhat louder voice, she asked, "How can this be possible?"

Since this medicine existed in the world and was already in use, there was clearly someone sending it to the various army headquarters. How was it possible that the maker of the medicine had not been found out?

The cleric raised his right hand to hint that she should pay attention to her emotions, but did not give an explanation.

"Even if we don't know the origins of this medicine, what can't we imitate the refining style? Even if there's no recipe, we can infer the ingredients from the composition of the pill."

Seeing the hesitant expression on the cleric's face, An Hua thought that she knew what he was apprehensive about and persuaded, "This is for helping the dying and healing the injured, not for business. The lives and safety of the soldiers on the frontlines are far more important than those banal morals and ideals. I'm confident that whether it's the archbishops or you, all of you understand this point."

The cleric shook his head and said, "You don't understand. This matter is very complicated, and this medicine is also very complicated. It's incredibly difficult to find the refinement process."

"From its name, we can guess that this pill's primary ingredient is cinnabar, with the other ingredients complementing it. If it really is so miraculous, the importance should rest on the complementing ingredients." An Hua stared into the cleric's eyes and then continued, "But please do not tell me that those complementing herbs are so precious and rare, because that won't convince me."

There was no such herb in the world that the Orthodoxy or the

Imperial Court could not find, but this fact could not make the cleric fall speechless. With a bitter smile, he replied, "Don't even talk about finding those complementing ingredients. Right now, no one has even been able to distinguish what sort of complementing ingredients were used in it in the first place."

An Hua was stunned once more, thinking to herself, with all the priests and scholars the Orthodoxy and the Imperial Court have, how could they fail to identify what complementing ingredients make up the medicine and how much is used?

The cleric whispered, "There are too few pills available for research, and the person providing the pills clearly stated in advance that researching it was forbidden."

An Hua's interest was piqued by this statement. She asked, "Just where did this pill come from?"

"As I said earlier, no one knows where the medicine came from. Everyone only knows that one year ago, a bottle of these pills appeared at Blue Pass."

The cleric's eyes suddenly turned bright as if they were glowing, not out of greed or desire, but yearning and respect.

There had been twenty pills in the bottle that had appeared in Blue Pass. Perhaps because their injuries were too severe or because the mysterious pill refiner had arranged things ahead of time, several soldiers on the verge of death took the pill and survived.

Such incidents continued to occur. No matter how severe the injuries, as long as the patient did not die on the spot, they would recover upon taking this pill. Although the wounded were not able to completely recover every time, with the damaged Ethereal Palaces or fractured meridians of some cultivators unable to recover, they had at least been able to distance themselves far away from the shadow of death.

Everyone who personally witnessed the sight of this pill saving patients all acclaimed it as a miracle.

News of this miracle naturally spread very quickly. In a short time, this mysterious medicine became the most famous item in the ten-some army headquarters located on the snowy plains.

At some point, people suddenly came to know that this medicine was called the Cinnabar Pill, yet nobody knew where it came from or who had made it.

'To save the dying and grow bones' was a saying that An Hua had seen before in the Daoist scriptures. She naturally knew that this was an exaggerated description that could not actually be real. However, the reactions of everyone in the Sacred Hospital and the shining eyes of the cleric both told her that this was real and had been witnessed. How could this sort of thing be possible? Even if the sacred medicines rumored to be stored in the depths of the Li Palace really did exist, they would presumably not have such a wondrous effect. Moreover, the quantity of sacred medicines was assuredly very small and thus meaningless to this sort of war...

She suddenly asked, "How many Cinnabar Pills are there in total?"

The cleric replied, "Nobody knows."

Upon hearing this answer once more, An Hua suddenly felt very tired.

But this time, it was not from the mystery of the whole affair, but because of a simple problem of mathematics.

"Every month, a bottle of Cinnabar Pills will appear, so nobody knows just how many pills that person has."

The cleric looked into her eyes and continued, "I'm more inclined to believe that the Cinnabar Pills were refined by that person and that they are continuing to be refined."

An Hua was shocked once more, her voice slightly tense as she said, "I also hope that it is so."

If this really was the case, then it meant that the supply of Cinnabar Pills sent to the frontlines would never cease, and there was even a chance that the amount might gradually increase.

In every aspect, this was the best-case scenario. Of course, this was all predicated on the idea that the Cinnabar Pill really was so wondrous.

An Hua looked at the cleric, her eyes somewhat hopeful, almost begging.

The cleric knew what she was feeling and what she wanted to hear, because he had once had a similar moment. That sort of anxiety and hope was difficult to forget.

He calmly and firmly said to her, "Yes, the Cinnabar Pill really can save lives, no matter how severe the injury suffered."

An Hua's hands were trembling, not because she was nervous, but because she was happy and bewildered.

She was both a cleric and a doctor, and her heart was brimming with compassion and charity. What she contemplated the most was how to help the dying and heal the injured.

She was well aware of what this signified: for the first time in history, the Human race possessed a sacred medicine that could be mass-produced.

To her, this signified that many deaths and partings would vanish, many pains would disappear.

Of course, this sacred medicine held many other meanings for humanity. For instance, people like array masters or cultivators would have another chance at life.

Then what did this pill mean for this war between the humans and the demons?

An Hua did not think about that.

She was thinking, if this pill is not a gift bestowed upon the Human race by the Divine Kingdom, what else could it be?

No matter who that person is, aren't they foreordained to stand at the pinnacle of history and receive the worship of the masses?

Chapter 745 – The Rules Laid Down by That Person

The conversation between An Hua and the cleric was not loud, but the room was too silent, so everyone else could still clearly hear their words and then develop their own worries.

If the creator of the pill were to make their identity known, they would assuredly obtain the greatest benefits due to the pill that they made. It would certainly not just be wealth, but also power and authority. However, it was very obvious that this person had never desired these sorts of benefits...but why? Was it to ensure their mystery, or for their safety?

An Hua still did not understand why the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy were incapable of finding out this person's identity. Could this medicine called the Cinnabar Pill possibly be ambrosia from the Divine Kingdom? It must be known that this medicine would be promptly distributed to the various military headquarters at set intervals, which would assuredly leave behind many clues. For instance, someone had to be in charge of distributing the medicine.

"The Wenshui Tang clan." The cleric knew what she was thinking and answered her question. "Delivery and distribution of the medicine is the responsibility of the Tang clan."

The hospital was located on the broadest street of the Mount Song Army headquarters. Across from it was the most critical area of the headquarters while behind was an inn standing on a street lined with plum trees. This inn was the most famous and most

luxurious inn in this fort and it was packed every day. However, many people were unaware that the most expensive room in this inn was only separated from the Sacred Hospital by a single wall.

A middle-aged man silently sat in this room upon a palace armchair, his expression rather gloomy. This was not a sign of his mood, only an indicator that he was exhausted from having far too many matters on his mind. This person was dressed very simply, but his clothes were made with the finest of materials, indicating that he was wealthy but wanted to conceal it. He was most likely someone involved in commerce.

The sound coming from behind the wall was so weak that even the best of robbers would find it difficult to hear. However, he had his head lowered as he listened with incredible focus. It was like he really could hear the details of this conversation. From this fact, one could vaguely guess that this person had quite the extraordinary cultivation. It was highly likely that he was a true expert.

The conversation in the Sacred Hospital continued.

An older doctor said, "This is a matter that everyone on the frontlines is concerned about, so someone has always been investigating this matter. Right now, it can be guaranteed that the Wenshui Tangs are responsible for transport and distribution, but are not the actual owner of the Cinnabar Pill. We can even say with confidence that not even the Wenshui Tangs know who that person is."

This sounded almost absurd, but it was probably true. Moreover,

at the very beginning, what people cared about more was how the Wenshui Tangs would divide up the medicine.

What was the most precious thing in the world? It was naturally life, which could not be retrieved. A medicine that could bring back a life was undoubtedly a treasure that everyone desired.

One who held the power of distributing this sort of medicine essentially held power over many people's lives.

This was an extremely terrifying power and also an equally heavy responsibility.

From a certain perspective, giving this power to another was actually just pushing the responsibility on someone else, simply avoiding the responsibility.

In An Hua's view, a person that was able to make the Cinnabar Pill could only be an honest and generous person whose heart cherished all living things, so they could not be this sort of person.

"This person did not completely pass on the authority to the Tang clan. Beforehand, they laid down many rules." The cleric smiled at her and explained, "The first rule was to forbid them from investigating his background or asking where the name 'Cinnabar Pill' came from. They also forbid anyone from analyzing the medicine to get its composition."

An Hua now understood why the room had become so silent and

everyone had given her such strange stares after she mentioned that the Imperial Court or Orthodoxy could analyze the pill to get the recipe.

Then how was it distributed? It was not very difficult to figure out how to distribute the Cinnabar Pills to the ten-some military headquarters, but she was not well-versed in this aspect. However, she could still imagine that the distribution was probably based on the number of soldiers in each of the headquarters. This method was the simplest and the fairest. The truly difficult point was how to distribute the medicine amongst the wounded.

The Mount Song Army headquarters was one of the larger of the ten-some army headquarters on the frontline, but every month, they were able to get only six pills at most. On their worst month, they had only received two. Moreover, even on the months when the war was at its most stable and there were no large military campaigns, there were at least one hundred casualties who were on the verge of death.

"The wounded that can be healed with the Sacred Light technique or by doctors can't be given the pill, no matter how serious their injuries, even if they've lost an arm or leg. As long as they won't die, they won't be given the medicine," explained the senior doctor. "Who receives the Cinnabar Pill has nothing to do with age, how high their position, or what sort of background they have. First priority is given to clerics and second priority to array masters."

An Hua very quickly understood why the medicine was divided as such.

The clerics on the frontline could all use the Sacred Light technique, whether it was just a few times or many times. One Cinnabar Pill saving a cleric meant that it could save many more people in the future. Array masters had the most important mission on the battlefield, felt the greatest pressure, died at the highest rates, and were also highly respected, so she could accept that they were ranked second.

The cleric added, "After that, we have to consider the cultivation of the wounded and the state of their injuries. Those with higher cultivation levels or more serious injuries will be placed higher on the list."

An Hua was somewhat puzzled as to why cultivators of higher levels could more easily receive the Cinnabar Pill.

The general suddenly said impassively, "As this is a war, saving an expert has more meaning to humanity than saving a normal person."

From a purely logical perspective, this was naturally a most reasonable argument, but...were not all lives equal?

It did not consider status, family, or age, but was it not still being distributed based on a hierarchy?

An Hua suddenly felt a little cold.

A furious voice could be heard from outside the room. "This isn't fair! Are the lives of us ordinary people also not lives?"

At some point, an injured soldier had appeared at the door, a crutch under his arm. One of his pantlegs drifted in the air—he had probably lost a leg on the battlefield.

It was plain to see that it was not the first time an injured soldier had furiously complained, both at the Mount Song Army headquarters and all the other military forts on the frontline.

No one looked at this wounded soldier. This room was very quiet, and even An Hua did not speak, only silently lowered her head to look at the floor.

Reality was cruel, and that person's distribution method for the Cinnabar Pill was truly very cruel, but no one could deny that it was proper.

An Hua raised her head and asked the cleric, "Then...who determines the severity of the injuries and how urgently they need to be treated?"

It was evident that this was truly the most important question, and also the most troublesome one.

Chapter 746 – The Bloody Incident Caused by the Medicine

In An Hua's view, determining the severity of an injury was a very important phase, and it was only right that such a duty fall on the able and moral Li Palace clerics, who were worthy of this trust. Yet, in the face of her questioning gaze, the cleric shook his head, hesitating to speak. His expression was rather complex.

"At the moment, the judgment on the severity of injuries is handled by the stewards of the Tang clan and the military doctors."

The senior doctor added, "That person also laid down rules for determining the severity of injuries. The specific conditions are all written very clearly, and at the moment, every Sacred Hospital has a copy. Both we and the stewards of the Tang clan have to follow these conditions, and nobody dares to act recklessly."

After saying this, he took out a book about half a finger thick from his sleeve and handed it to An Hua.

An Hua took the book and began to flip through it. The more she saw, the deeper the respect in her eyes became. The cleric had naturally seen this book as well and sighed, "Even without the Cinnabar Pill, one can see just from this book on judging the severity of injuries that the writer would be the most famous doctor of the generation."

After reading through the book, she returned it to the doctor and then mentioned her last and most important question.

"How can this person ensure that his rules are effectively carried out?"

In the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green, she had devoted her entire mind to study, never once inquiring into the outside world, but she knew that the minds of people were sinister, the ways of the world complex. In addition, loopholes could be found in even the most perfect system of rules, and taken together with the fact that these were life-or-death matters, with so many powerful cultivators and important figures in the forts on the frontlines, it was truly difficult to keep control, and nobody would care about these rules. For instance, if some grandson of a powerful minister of the court were to be severely injured but did not have the right to receive a Cinnabar Pill based on these rules, who would dare deny him the pill and watch him die?

"Such a situation truly did occur at Blue Pass. Divine General Fei Dian's nephew stole a Cinnabar Pill."

The cleric glanced at the general and continued, "Afterwards, Blue Pass did not receive a single Cinnabar Pill for two whole months, and the hearts of the soldiers became unsteady. Seething with discontent, the troops rebelled, and one squad that had suffered particularly grievous losses on the battlefield charged into the Divine General's estate, took out that nephew who was recovering from his wounds, and hacked him into meat paste."

An Hua somewhat uneasily asked, "But this was open robbery... but what if some truly important figure pulled some strings before the medicine was even distributed?"

The cleric looked into her eyes and said, "You probably don't know that the Wenshui Tangs were not the first to be in charge of distribution. It was actually the Hall of Illustrious Persons."

An Hua was somewhat shocked. "Is Sir saying that it was the Orthodoxy that was responsible for distribution at the very beginning? Then why did it later pass on to the Tang clan?"

"Just like you said, someone attempted to pull some strings before the medicine was distributed."

The cleric ruefully sighed, "There was a student from the Temple Seminary sent to the frontlines. This student had astonishing talent and was even regarded as surpassing Tianhai Ya'er. Moreover, he was virtuous, outstanding, and gallant on the battlefield. In a sudden encounter with the wolf cavalry, he suffered severe injuries in order to cover the retreat of his schoolmates."

An Hua was confused. "And this person didn't have the right to receive a Cinnabar Pill?"

"It was at a very remote fort which only received one Cinnabar Pill every three months, and his luck was very poor."

"What do you mean?"

"An unaffiliated array master that had similarly heavy injuries

was ranked in front of him."

"So it was like that."

"When the Bishop of the Temple Seminary came to know of this matter, he asked a cardinal of the Hall of Illustrious Persons to pull some strings and place this student's name in front of the array master's."

To the Li Palace, a young student with astonishing talent and prospects was far more important than some cultivator who had no sect.

An Hua would not have done such a thing, but she could understand why the Bishop of the Temple Seminary had done so.

"When the Temple Seminary student took the Cinnabar Pill, he truly did recover, and he suffered no residual effects."

"And the unaffiliated array master?"

"He died."

This was the expected end for that array master, but these ordinary words seemed to stir such sorrow and helplessness.

An Hua fell silent, then asked, "What happened after that?"

Since it was the Bishop of the Temple Seminary and a cardinal of the Hall of Illustrious Persons that had acted, then whether they had adjusted the places in the line or done something else in the background, they had probably left no evidence. She had even thought of an even more terrifying possibility. For the sake of obtaining a Cinnabar Pill, perhaps some important figure was even willing to assassinate the wounded that were ahead of them in line!

"The fort was not affected in any way. Just as before, it received one Cinnabar Pill every three months."

The cleric's expression suddenly turned grave. "But from that moment, the Hall of Illustrious Persons was no longer able to receive a single Cinnabar Pill. No one knew how that person was able to learn of this matter, nor did that person give any proof. He simply withdrew the power of distributing the Cinnabar Pill from the Hall of Illustrious Persons and gave it to the Wenshui Tangs."

The room was utterly silent. Everyone still remembered the major incident from last year.

The cleric sighed. "Upon learning of this matter, Archbishop Mao Qiuyu's anger was like a thunderstorm. He ordered Linghai Zhiwang to begin a purge of the Hall of Illustrious Persons. The cardinal was executed, the Bishop of the Temple Seminary was exiled from the Orthodoxy, and many other important figures suffered a great misfortune from this matter."

An Hua knew that an extremely senior and powerful cardinal of the Hall of Illustrious Persons had died, but she had thought that he had died from an illness. She was shocked to learned that this

was the actual reason for his death.

The relationship between the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy was no longer as tense as it was two years ago, but the two sides remained in opposition to each other. On the frontlines of the war against the demons, it was naturally the Imperial Court whose words carried the most weight. In this sort of situation, the Orthodoxy had to treasure every chance it had to display its strength, let alone something as important as the power to distribute the Cinnabar Pill.

That cardinal and the Bishop of the Temple Seminary had offended the master of the Cinnabar Pill and caused the Orthodoxy to lose an extremely precious resource. Even if they died ten thousand times, they would not be able to make up for this loss. Mao Qiuyu was known for his benevolence, but since it was his own subordinates that had caused so much trouble, his fury and the harsh measures he had taken were completely understandable.

"After that incident, no one dared to go against the system arranged for the Cinnabar Pill, and no one dared to cheat the wounded and secretly store up pills. Incidents in which pills were stolen also gradually came to a stop."

The cleric continued, "This was all because of the rules laid down by that person. Yes, no one knows who that person is. Perhaps they're just some ordinary countryside doctor with no means of ensuring their rules are kept, but they have the Cinnabar Pill, so their words have strength. The bloody incident of the Hall of Illustrious Persons is proof of this. In order to keep this power of distributing the medicine, the Wenshui Tangs are even willing to

kill people to preserve these rules. No matter where you hide, if the Tang clan wants to kill you, how can you survive?"

Chapter 747 – Rare Product

The most wondrous medicine, if not able to be used, was no different from trash. To the young array master on his last breaths lying on the bed, the Cinnabar Pill was precisely this sort of existence. The general walked out of the room without looking at him. When walking past An Hua and the cleric, he stopped and requested that they take care of him, then said a harsh phrase.

"I won't say that that person is seeking fame, but that person must have a very grand scheme."

They understood what the general meant. Regardless of whether that person found this divine medicine through the study of ancient books or developed it through their own research, if they really did care about the safety of humanity, if they really did pity the fate of mankind, then the most proper thing to do was to reveal the recipe.

Upon confirming that the Cinnabar Pill truly did have such a wondrous effect and had even saved many people that should have died, An Hua had formed an extremely good impression of that enigmatic person that she, or anyone else, had never met. She did not wish to believe that this person was a schemer or had ulterior motives, but she could not refute the general's words.

That person only sent out one bottle of Cinnabar Pills every month. To the soldiers on the frontlines, several dozen pills was still insufficient, but she believed that that person had already done all they could. Perhaps because they could not collect enough rare ingredients or were limited by their ability, they could not

increase the number of pills. But if they were just willing to distribute the recipe, these problems would be easily resolved. Just as she thought in the beginning, no matter how precious and rare were the ingredients required, the Orthodoxy and the Imperial Court would assuredly be able to find them.

The Orthodoxy and the Imperial Court could produce this medicine in large quantities, bestowing on the Human race an extraordinary advantage in this war and brightening the future of the continent. Of course, this would also be of great benefit to that person. They would receive gratitude and countless rewards from the entire world. Even if they could not cultivate, they would still become a true Saint.

So why was this person not willing?

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The middle-aged man quietly sipped tea on his chair. The manager of the inn stood in front of him, not daring to move.

He listened to the voices coming from behind the wall, and his lips turned into a mocking smile. "A Saint? They're nothing more than a hoarder."

The inn manager pressed his body even lower, not daring to say anything.

Hoarding a rare product was a merchant's business strategy.

How much money was a Cinnabar Pill worth? In terms of medical efficacy, it could regrow bones and save the dying, naturally making it an invaluable treasure. But in reality, from the moment the Cinnabar Pill first appeared at Blue Pass, it had never been sold for a price. It could not be obtained with money, only through waiting—if one's fate was to survive until that point.

Whether it was the master of the Cinnabar Pill, the Hall of Illustrious Persons, or the Wenshui Tang clan, none of them had obtained any profit from the Cinnabar Pill. Some people thought that it was completely unreasonable for the Wenshui Tangs to offend so many factions and powerful people for the sake of this pill from which they obtained no profit. But the truly wise thought this view to be unquestionably and incredibly idiotic. The master of the Cinnabar Pill had laid down rules, but laws were dead, and there were always areas that could be taken advantage of. For instance, if there were two heavily injured array masters who were incredibly similar both in cultivation and military achievement, how was it decided which came first?

At these moments, it was the Tang clan that held the power.

Even though this power would not always appear and seemed very insignificant, the tiniest piece used to its absolute extent was still as vast as the ocean, and there was no limit to how much it should be valued. The Tang clan would never give up on such a resource, and in order to ensure that they kept it for a long time, would do their utmost to satisfy that man's demands, including

carrying out his rules.

After the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, the Tang clan's status in the human world had risen even higher, leaving the Tianhai clan far behind them to become the number one noble clan of the Great Zhou Dynasty. Now that they had obtained the power to distribute the Cinnabar Pill, they had further consolidated their status, even causing many factions to fear them.

A normal noble clan would most likely have been content with this sort of position, but the Wenshui Tangs were no normal clan. They were the earliest merchant clan on the continent, and merchants were never content, always greedy and never satisfied. Regardless of how judgmental such a phrase was, business was business, and the Tang clan could naturally not be satisfied by the profits brought by the Cinnabar Pill.

Compared to the mystical effects of the Cinnabar Pill, the profits it brought were excessively small, and besides...they were not playing the leading role.

The enigmatic individual was the true boss here, a fact that the Tang clan found impossible to accept.

Whether it was in military arms, army provisions, city walls and moats, treasures, or medicines, any business venture that the Tang clan participated in on the continent could only have them as the sole boss, or at least the majority shareholder.

Starting from many thousands of years ago, greed for profit and

an overpowering desire for control had been the most defining aspects of the Wenshui Tangs, even becoming the reasons for their existence. These two points had long since mixed into the blood of every member of the Tang clan, transforming into an obsession. Thus, even after the bloody incident of the Hall of Illustrious Persons, they still wanted to obtain more from the Cinnabar Pill.

And they wanted, more than anyone else, to know who the true master of the Cinnabar Pill was.

Compared to the other powers of the world, they were unquestionably the closest to this individual. Perhaps a few layers of fog still lay between them and that person, but they could almost make out the true appearance.

Indeed, this inn was the property of the Wenshui Tang clan.

The middle-aged man was the seventeenth master of the Wenshui Tangs.

He had traveled over vast distances from Wenshui to the Mount Song Army headquarters to find the secret hidden by the Cinnabar Pill.

A deferential voice, barely concealing its fear, came from beyond the door.

"The product from Black Mountain has arrived."

The Tang Seventeenth Master slightly raised his eyebrows at this news, his eyes brightening.

He stood up from the chair and, guided by the inn manager, came to a secret room in the inn's backyard.

In the center of this secret room was a massive table made of black stone. Upon the table was a product that the Wenshui Tangs had paid a massive price to transport from the Black Mountain Army headquarters.

It was a corpse.

The deceased was a man who had suffered the most grievous of injuries. His face and neck were charred black, clearly burned by highly toxic demon flames. The half-untied clothes were clearly of military style. His fingers were extremely long and slender, his knuckles slightly bulging. The horrifying wound across his chest was still glimmering with vestiges of star radiance that had not completely dispersed.

From this detail, one could tell that this was a Star Condensation cultivator that had died in battle with a demon expert. There was a high chance that he was a general of the Great Zhou Army.

The Seventeenth Master removed a pure white handtowel from his sleeve to cover his nose and mouth, and used his eyes to order the inn manager to step forward.

The manager walked up to the black table and took up a small, sharp knife. He cut along the corpse's chest, starting from the existing wound and cutting downward.

With a tiny tearing sound, the knife cut upon the deceased's stomach. A green and stinking liquid burst out and dripped onto the table.

The Tang Seventeenth Master slightly creased his brow, somewhat disgustedly holding the towel even closer to his face, but he did not avert his gaze.

Before him, the inn manager had looked like a particularly mediocre servant, but at this moment, he looked like an extremely seasoned coroner.

Without hesitation, the inn manager thrust his hands into the corpse's stomach. After rummaging around for a few moments, he extracted a small bag.

This bag was made of some unknown material, not leather or paper. Its surface was very glossy and it felt very thin and soft to the touch. It could faintly be seen that there was something round inside.

It could be a stone or a pearl.

It could also be a pill.

Chapter 748 – Observations on the Medicine

The small bag was long and slender. When it was still in the body of the expert from the Great Zhou Army, the bag's upper half was probably in the esophagus, the opening at the throat, and there also seemed to be some sort of mechanism concealed at the opening. The Wenshui Tangs had been able to make the Yellow Paper Umbrella, so they probably also had methods to cut off anything that was placed in the bag from the outside world.

The inn manager did not immediately open the bag. Instead, he very seriously and meticulously washed his hands until they were so clean that they seemed new. He then used four towels to wipe his hands dry, ensuring that there was no lingering moisture. Finally, he opened the bag and took out the item within.

It was a pill about the size of a pea. It had a dark red sheen akin to blood. Perhaps because it had been affected by the moisture in the corpse, its surface was slightly puckered. Upon seeing this, the manager seemed slightly distressed and the Tang Seventeenth Master's face became gloomy.

"It should be fine," the manager said in a shaky voice, then hurriedly placed the blood-red pill in a pot that had been prepared in advance.

The pot was filled with wheat husks, and certainly no ordinary wheat husks. They had been filtered and dried many times, and were now ivory-white. They were absolutely dry without the slightest bit of moisture.

The manager covered the pill with the wheat husks and then used his hand to lightly rub the husks against the pill. His fingers moved with particular gentleness, as if he was caressing his lover. The pill rolled about the wheat husks, and with the passing of time, it gradually became completely clean, its dark red color growing increasingly vivid, arousing and entrapping the soul.

The Wenshui Tang clan's understanding of this pill was not complete. They only knew that it would melt upon encountering water and become very difficult to preserve. At this point, the manager finally confirmed that there was no problem with this cleaning method, so the gaze he aimed at the pill also turned gentle and warm. Of course, it was still inferior to the gaze he aimed at the Tang Seventeenth Master.

Beaming, he said, "Seventeenth Master's wisdom is truly outstanding. This method really does work."

The Tang Seventeenth Master ignored this flattery. He extracted a new, snow-white towel from his sleeve and padded his hand with it, taking the pill. After examining it for a very long time, his eyes gradually began to glow with fervor. He suddenly noticed this change in mood and slightly frowned. He grimly said, "Is this pill truly so wondrous?"

The manager had not noticed the subtle change in the Seventeenth Master's emotions as he replied, "It really is, or else we would not have troubled the esteemed Seventeenth Master to personally come."

He was currying favor with his master, but as he spoke, he could

not help but stare at the pill in the master's palm and lick the corner of his lips.

This subconscious action revealed that he was somewhat nervous and also revealed the greed and longing in his heart.

The Tang Seventeenth Master noticed this and his lips perked into a smile. "Do you know what this is?"

The manager's expression slightly shifted as he thought, is this not the legendary Cinnabar Pill?

"This is neither pill nor wealth, but power."

The Tang Seventeenth Master intoned, "The power to decide life and death is the greatest power in the world."

The manager praised, "Seventeenth Master's words are extraordinary."

The Seventeenth Master impassively said, "If someone were to covet this power but lack the corresponding strength, they would only be seeking their death."

The manager's body went stiff, and then he lowered his head, no longer daring to even glance at the pill.

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A succession of people entered the secret room and encircled the black table. One of these people was a Guardian from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets who specialized in medicine, two of them were the most renowned doctors of Fengyang County, one was a cleric of unknown background which the Tang clan had hired for an enormous amount of money, and there was also a physician who treated the Tang Old Master's meridians.

Regardless of their status, they all had the same expression on their faces.

It was an expression that was calm on the surface but actually extremely nervous, and thus seemed rather stiff.

They were all looking at the red pill on the table, and it wasn't just a glance. They had already glanced at it many times, and for a very long time.

They were nervous because they knew what this pill was, so they naturally developed a desire to snatch it away, but they knew that they absolutely could not do this.

One of the doctors from Fengyang County, afraid that he would not be able to resist this temptation, forcefully lowered his head.

To look, smell, ask, and cut were things that doctors needed to do

to treat illness. Right now, the subject of their observation was not an illness, but a medicine, yet they still could not escape these methods.

They had looked at this medicine for a very long time, so next, it was naturally time to smell it.

The physician from Wenshui glanced at the Tang Seventeenth Master.

This old physician was specifically meant to treat the Tang Old Master's meridians. If this matter today had not been so urgent, the Tang Seventeenth Master would have been powerless to request him to come over from Wenshui City.

The Seventeenth Master was naturally more courteous to this physician, saying, "Please, Doctor Yang, do as you wish."

Upon hearing this, the old physician surnamed Yang from Wenshui immediately lowered his head, bringing it above the red pill, and took in a deep sniff.

In the next moment, Doctor Yang's face instantly turned red and his eyes blurred, as if he was intoxicated. It was like he was amongst a wealthy and pleasant party and had gotten so drunk that he didn't know where he was.

The Guardian from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets slightly frowned and gave two coughs.

Doctor Yang came to his senses and said, "The primary ingredient truly is cinnabar. There is also golden eye grass, cinnamon, angelica, gouji berry, cloves, crystal sugar..."

With a single sniff, he had been able to distinguish so many ingredients. This physician's skill as a doctor was truly extraordinary.

Upon hearing these ingredients, the Tang Seventeenth Master creased his brow, thinking, is this for making beef stew? Why does it need crystal sugar?

He had no idea that these relatively common ingredients that the common people would use in making beef stew, with their moderate nature, were also perfect for serving as complementing ingredients in medicine. They could be found in the vast majority of the world's medicines. As for crystal sugar, it was like frying rice, catalyzing the effectiveness of the herbs and also... counteracting the bitterness.

The Guardian from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets and the two doctors from Fengyang County were both medical professionals, so they were naturally not perturbed by this. They also sniffed the pill, reporting that there were yams, cloves, and cistanche.

As they gazed at the still-wet ink on the paper, the doctors muttered for a while, then chatted amongst themselves. Finally, they said to the Tang Seventeenth Master, "We still have to work on it directly."

Until now, they had only looked and smelled, but no one dared to touch it. They all knew how precious this pill was.

All the doctors agreed that they needed to work on it directly, but the one speaking for them all was Doctor Yang. He was a part of the Wenshui Tang clan, so it was more convenient for him to speak.

When the Cinnabar Pill first appeared, the rules laid down by that person had still not been complete. The Great Zhou Army and the Hall of Illustrious Persons had secretly worked together to intercept a few pills so as to analyze them for the composition of the pill. Yet, they wasted three whole pills but were still unable to produce the complete recipe. The doctors present in this secret room were all extraordinary individuals, but how could they perform this feat by just looking and smelling?

The Tang Seventeenth Master had long since mentally prepared himself, but he still couldn't suppress his disappointment, as he knew that this Cinnabar Pill was very quickly going to be ruined.

"Be careful not to waste it," he warned with a gloomy expression; "this is the lives of two people."

Chapter 749 – Blood Coral

The Tang Seventeenth Master was naturally speaking of the Cinnabar Pill.

The other people in the room were somewhat confused. The Cinnabar Pill could save the dying and regrow bones, could cure injuries no matter how severe, so it was naturally the equivalent of one life. Why had the Tang Seventeenth Master said that it was two lives? If it was because many people had died for something as important as the Cinnabar Pill, then he should have said that it was worth the lives of many people.

"This pill can save one person's life, and in order to obtain this pill, my Tang clan also had to exchange a life for it."

The Seventeenth Master thought of that corpse that had already been burned into ashes and his face grew even gloomier.

The deceased had been an insider that the Tang clan had raised up in the Great Zhou Army for many years and had enormous potential. At the time, he had already become a rather well-known deputy general of the Black Mountain Army headquarters. If the Tang clan continued to help him develop, there was even a chance he could become a Divine General in a few decades, but now he had died for the sake of this pill.

It had already been a whole nine months since the Tang clan had taken the power to distribute the Cinnabar Pill from the Hall of Illustrious Persons, and the Tang clan had found it impossible to

further suppress their natural greed. They wanted to obtain even greater profits from this pill and wished to clarify the composition of the pill. In order to hide this plan from the enigmatic supplier, they had acted with the utmost of caution.

After extremely careful calculations, the Tang clan had determined that the deputy general had the right to receive a Cinnabar Pill, so they had him suffer severe injuries on the battlefield.

Just as expected, one of the Cinnabar Pills allotted to the Black Mountain Army headquarters was given to the deputy general. According to the rules, the pill was sent to the deputy general without delay. Under the watch of many people, he took the pill, and yet...he was unable to survive, because his luck was truly awful.

The instant the Cinnabar Pill entered his throat, he died.

Many people who saw this felt a great pity. The minority pitied the deputy general's luck, but the vast majority pitied the fact that since the deputy general had died, a Cinnabar Pill had been wasted. Everyone knew that the Cinnabar Pill would melt upon contact with water, losing all of its potency. Now that it had entered the deputy general's stomach, it would be impossible to recover.

It was precisely because they were so sure of this point that everyone present ruefully sighed, even cursed, but thought little else.

Only the Wenshui Tangs knew that the deputy general's body had long been implanted with that bag made from mysterious materials. Moreover, whether or not that deputy general was willing to die after taking the Cinnabar Pill, his death was assured. This was because two old Guardians of the Tang clan had been standing at his bedside, watching him.

The deputy general was buried according to the customs of his home county, but on the very night of his burial, the new grave was excavated.

Today, his corpse had delivered the Cinnabar Pill to the Mount Song Army headquarters before the eyes of the Tang Seventeenth Master.

The Tang Seventeenth Master spoke no more, but everyone else could feel his mood, and their faces turned grave.

The Guardian from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets took out a silver spoon and pulverized the dark red pill in a porcelain dish. After slowly grinding it into powder, he divided it into five portions.

Each master doctor took a portion and then began using the techniques, skills, and oddly-shaped tools that they would normally never show in front of others to begin their research.

Grinding up the medicine and determining its ingredients was a required course of action in trying to reproduce the recipe. It was extremely monotonous and thus seemed extremely time-

consuming.

The Seventeenth Master remained in the secret room the entire time, not even taking one step out.

After some time, red light seeped in from the western air vent. It was already dusk. The task was finally completed, and the doctors raised their heads, either dripping herbal water into their bloodshot eyes or constantly rubbing their necks and relaxing their aching bodies.

But this seemingly relaxed and calm environment was still tinged with an air of tension. From beginning to end, nobody had spoken.

The Tang Seventeenth Master turned even gloomier, just like the gloom of the wall which could not receive the dusky light coming from the west.

In the end, this situation could not persist for too long.

The physician from Wenshui gave a few tired coughs and then wrote the ingredients he had found on a sheet of paper.

The other master doctors also recorded their conclusions.

The Tang Seventeenth Master continued to crease his brow, but his expression relaxed somewhat. He could tell that the ingredients and portions written down were basically the same.

"It truly is an unprecedented remedy. Absolutely extraordinary. It looks simple and clumsy, but it actually conceals a great wisdom. If used to staunch blood or purify oneself, it will probably be incredibly effective."

Then the old physician from Wenshui shook his head. "But...it certainly can't do what it's rumored to do."

The Tang Seventeenth Master did not speak, as he knew that there was undoubtedly a follow-up, at the very least an explanation.

"There was one scent that this old and useless thing analyzed for a long time but was still unable to identify."

Doctor Yang glanced at the Guardian from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets and the two doctors from Fengyang County and said, "I think that everyone else here experienced the same."

The three doctors all nodded, their expressions somewhat at a loss.

Doctor Yang continued, "There exists no medicinal ingredient in the world that even the four of us cannot identify...which can only mean that this is not a medicinal ingredient, at least not before that person used it to make the Cinnabar Pill. In my view, the wondrous effects of the Cinnabar Pill...probably rest on that substance."

The Tang Seventeenth Master stepped forward, took the magnifying lens offered by the Guardian from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets, and carefully examined the small dish on the table.

In the small dish were the remnants of the pill. With the analysis done, it had been dissolved in water and then boiled. If one just used one's eyes to look at it, one would only see a normal medicinal broth. Even with the eyes of a cultivating expert like the Tang Seventeenth Master, he could only see some powder. But under the magnifying lens produced by the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets, the true appearance of the powder was finally revealed.

The vast desert was scattered about with stones, as well as a few shards of red crystal. Compared to the vast barrens that were the rest of the medicinal concoction, they were extremely sparse.

By examining even more carefully, one could make out that these red shards of crystal were formed from countless threads of colored glass, but externally, they seemed extremely tough and impossible to tear apart. If one stared at the red crystals for even longer, one might even be able to feel the terrifying power held within the light of the crystals.

These red crystal shards were the reason for the dark red color of the Cinnabar Pill, and also the answer to the question that the master doctors had racked their brains over.

After some time, the Tang Seventeenth Master raised his head to

the doctors and asked, "What is this? Or...what could it be?"

The cleric, who had been silent this entire time, finally spoke.

"It looks rather like...blood coral."

Upon hearing the words 'blood coral', the master doctors all revealed expressions of astonishment, and then they fell into deep thought.

The Seventeenth Master was also very shocked. After a few moments, he firmly declared, "Impossible!"

This cleric was once a bishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons. He had luckily managed to keep his life during the purge led by Mao Qiuyu and Linghai Zhiwang, but he was driven from the Li Palace. In the Hall of Illustrious Persons, he was in charge of refining pills, and he had once interacted with the Cinnabar Pill. Thus, logically speaking, his conclusion should have been very trustworthy, yet he was unable to convince the Tang Seventeenth Master.

This was because the Tang Seventeenth Master happened to know that the only piece of blood coral in existence currently rested within the old mansion of the Tang clan.

Chapter 750 – That Person

It was only after that strange incident in Wenshui City that the Tang Seventeenth Master began to oversee the clan's medicine businesses, but he had extensive knowledge and experience, and blood coral was an extremely famous item...it was not actual coral, but crystallized dragon blood. Moreover, no ordinary dragon would do. Blood coral could only be formed from the crystallized true blood of Golden Dragons or Black Frost Dragons.

To the Dragon race, blood coral was the most sacred of objects and they would not let any other race possess it. Not even the Great Zhou Imperial Palace or the Li Palace had any, and it was only because of a story that had taken place countless years ago that the Wenshui Tangs were so fortunate as to possess a piece of blood coral about the size of a forearm. This was kept hidden away in a secret room within their old mansion, and they never dared to take it out.

This bishop, in the face of the Tang Seventeenth Master's assertion, somewhat hesitantly said, "If someone were to have sneaked into the Southern Sea..."

The Seventeenth Master shook his head. "All of the Dragon race regard blood coral as importantly as their own lives. Even if Zhou Dufu were to come back to life, he would not be able to remove it from the many dragons that would stop him."

The bishop asked in confusion, "But other than crystallized dragon blood, what else could contain such abundant energy and such a thick aroma of life?"

The Tang Seventeenth Master fell into deep thought, then asked, "Could it possibly be Sacred Light?"

"This strange substance does not give off any Sacred Qi, and its energy is too violent."

The bishop shook his head and added, "And Sacred Light is incorporeal and extremely difficult to make real. Not even the five archbishops of the Li Palace can do it unless they offer up their essence blood."

Doctor Yang noted, "Correct, the ingredients that we were able to identify are probably used to mollify the destructive power of this violent energy. Crucially, according to the scriptures of the church, materializing Sacred Light requires an archbishop to offer up all his essence blood. How could it possibly be used to produce this continuous flow of Cinnabar Pills?"

One of the Fengyang doctors asked in shock, "Is this not saying that if one wanted to use crystallized Sacred Light to save a life, you could only use it once, and it would also require an archbishop to sacrifice their life?"

The bishop solemnly affirmed, "Correct, the starry sky has always been fair. Life has always had no distinction between the high and the low."

The Tang Seventeenth Master fell silent for a very long time, seemingly pondering something. In the end, he asked no more

questions, announcing, "All of you have one more day and night."

After saying this, he walked out of the secret room and into the chilly courtyard. His gaze swept past the bare branches and onto the distant and gloomy sky.

The manager and the bishop came up behind him. They could sense his current mood and could see that he was worrying over something, so they kept quiet.

The Wenshui Tangs had paid such an enormous price, inviting so many famous doctors, but their true objective was not to analyze the contents of the pill and find a way to make the Cinnabar Pill for themselves. Even the Hall of Illustrious Persons and the Great Zhou Army had failed, proving that this path was either a dead end or too difficult to walk.

What the Tang clan truly aimed to do was to use the herbal composition to find out where the Cinnabar Pill was coming from. Golden eye grass grew everywhere, but golden eye grass that grew in different places would be subtly different in terms of medicinal power. Angelica was even more common on the continent, but one could always find a few clues through the flow of the herbs. There was also cinnamon, and goat weed...

Everything in the world had to leave traces, and the Tang clan, as a clan that made their way through the world on the path of business, possessed a nigh unimaginable amount of resources and a vast network. Thus, it was easiest for them to seize upon these traces and then find out where these traces sprang from or where they would ultimately end. If they could find out where the

Cinnabar Pill was coming from, they would naturally find that person.

To this war between humans and demons, this person was far too important. Even if the war didn't exist, that person would still be important.

Whether it was the Tang clan, the Orthodoxy, or the Imperial Court, they all naturally wished to control this person.

"Working backwards from these thirty-four ingredients, we should be able to find out where the Cinnabar Pill is being made, but even if we do find that person, we might not be able to control him."

It was evident that this bishop knew the Tang clan's true goal. Slightly uneasy, he said, "The Hall of Illustrious Persons and the two Divine Generals of Blue Pass attempted something similar. Although they were not as close to that person as we are, they probably also found some clues, even made a plan."

The manager glanced at the bishop and then asked, "If we can't control him, do we just kill him?"

The bishop nodded.

This sounded incredibly unreasonable, but in this vicious human world, it was actually the right and proper action.

'Such a wondrous pill, such an important person. Either I use them or they die, but they absolutely can't fall into the hands of anyone else, especially my enemies.'

"Out of consideration for the war, the military has a rather conservative stance and doesn't have too deep an involvement in this affair, but the Hall of Illustrious Persons is greatly concerned that that person will be controlled by the Imperial Court. Moreover, they also knew that that person was not willing to be found and would assuredly be infuriated, so they made plans in advance to kill that person, but..."

A tinge of fear appeared on the bishop's face, and his voice trembled. "In one night, thirty-three bishops of the Xunyang Church died the most miserable of deaths."

The manager's expression instantly transformed. "A very unyielding response, a very formidable move."

It was obvious that Xunyang Church, which had lost thirty-three bishops in one night, had been in charge of conducting this matter.

The bishop looked at the Tang Seventeenth Master and said, "The purge in the capital conducted by Mao Qiuyu and Linghai Zhiwang might have been to conceal this matter."

There was a sense that the bishop had not completely expressed what he wanted to say, and the Tang Seventeenth Master was silent, but he was actually thinking about other things.

He had his own speculations as to who the master of the Cinnabar Pill was. Like a few other people, he also thought it might be that person who had disappeared.

If those crystals containing that violent energy really were the legendary blood coral, then the answer seemed even more certain.

He was the Tang Second Master's brother and also his most trusted subordinate, so he knew more secrets than most.

That person that had disappeared currently had a dragon at their side, and it just so happened to be a Black Frost Dragon.

But it was only today that he learned that thirty-three bishops of the Xunyang Church had died in a single night.

This made him somewhat doubt his conclusion.

That person might have the ability to make such a formidable move and they had the right to make such an unyielding response, but that person was not this cruel and callous, and those bishops were essentially their subordinates. That person was undoubtedly a great personage, but never seemed conscious of this fact.

Moreover, based on the Tang clan's analysis, if that person was not dead, they should be in the south.

Last year, a desperate battle had taken place on the snowy plains. The Great Zhou Dynasty's black-armored heavy cavalry had

engaged in close combat with the demons' wolf cavalry on the vast and boundless plain.

No one had expected that that person who had been missing for so long would appear on the battlefield with a downpour of swords. They engaged in a bloody battle, reversing the course of the battle but also suffering severe injuries at the hands of the terrifyingly strong Demon General Hai Di. At that point, that person disappeared into the sea of humans, never appearing again.

Only a few important characters like the Tang Seventeenth Master knew that after being wounded by Hai Di, that person had been ambushed immediately afterward by three human experts.

This was naturally a most shameless affair and could not be revealed to anyone, so the Imperial Court had kept an extremely tight lid on this information.

So in the Tang clan's judgment, if that person had managed to survive by a fluke, it was only natural that they be in the south.

The greatest possibility was Holy Maiden Peak, but it could also be Scholartree Manor or Mount Li. Only these places could safeguard their life.

If that person was in the south, then the Cinnabar Pill that had been present in the forts of the frontline for a year already had no relationship to that person.

Then why were there so many clues that all seemed to vaguely point in their direction?

Could it be that the master of the Cinnabar Pill hidden behind the curtain wished to use that person's name to perform some great undertaking?

Chapter 751 – Nothing More Than Playing House (I)

The path of merchants was always established on cold hard realism, so only when the prize had fallen into their bag would they feel peace and happiness. In addition, any sort of befuddling fog would be utterly worthless when torn away.

The Tang Seventeenth Master decided to stop thinking about that person's identity, deciding that he would first find them and then think about it. His gaze moved from the manager's face to the bishop, upon which he said, "The Second Master's orders this time were exceptionally clear. This person must be found and then put under our control. If that's not possible, I will die, and the rest of you will die. And you will die the most miserably of all."

This bishop was a spy that the Tang clan had placed in the Orthodoxy. Now that he had been driven from the capital, although he had managed to escape with his life, he was useless. If he could not display his loyalty, ability, or use in this matter of the Cinnabar Pill, then his end would most likely be very inglorious.

The bishop's face paled at these words and the manager's back was soaked in cold sweat. The pair were both keenly aware that this matter involved the internal competition for power within the clan back in Wenshui. Although their statuses were not sufficient to know all the facts, they both knew that Wenshui City had been ravaged by no small number of storms over these past two years.

The struggle between the branches was growing fiercer by the day, even rather bitter. Although no one had died yet, the entire

conflict was pervaded by the faint scent of blood. The most important sign was that the illness of the chief branch's master had relapsed, and at the beginning of this year, the Tang Second Master, whose reputation had been growing and growing... fathered a son.

The Wenshui Tang clan had existed for countless generations, so it had its own rules.

Many years ago, the Old Master decided that the chief branch would inherit the clan, thus making Tang Thirty-Six the sole heir and grandson of the Tang clan.

In the period before Tang Thirty-Six formally inherited the clan, the Old Master had forbidden any of the other branches from giving birth to a third generation of male offspring.

This was an extremely callous rule, but thankfully, the masters of the various branches had all had some success in their cultivation and had lifespans of centuries. They could be patient.

At the beginning of this year, this rule was finally broken.

The Tang Second Master fathered a son.

Besides Tang Thirty-Six, he was the sole male descendant of the Tang clan's third generation.

What did this mean? Had the Old Master finally changed his

mind on who would inherit the clan? Was the chief branch going to fall out of favor? Or was it that the Tang Second Master no longer had the patience to keep waiting and decided to plainly and boldly express his ambitions to seize power?

Ambitions naturally had to be established on strength. At the moment, the other branches of the Tang clan, led by the Second Master, had gained the clear advantage in this conflict.

In the massive coup two years ago in the capital and in the few years preceding it, the Tang Second Master had played an extremely important role. As a representative of Shang Xingzhou, he had traveled across the continent, serving as a liaison with the various factions so that they could work together to overturn Tianhai's rule. In the coup itself, he had played an irreplaceable role in breaking the capital's Imperial Design.

In this grand undertaking, the Tang Second Master had played his part perfectly, and also in a very low-key manner. He had brought unimaginable benefits to the Wenshui Tangs while also acting in accordance with the Tang clan's style. As a result, he had received the support, even worship, of many of his clansmen.

If he had not failed to kill Wang Po in the winter of that year, perhaps he would have already replaced Tang Thirty-Six's father...

Upon hearing that this was the Tang Second Master's order, the manager and bishop instantly dispelled any ideas of begging for forgiveness or escaping by a fluke.

They could only quickly find that person, and if they couldn't control him, they had to kill him.

Perhaps because the Tang Second Master's coldness was too well-known, or perhaps because the Tang Seventeenth Master was sitting in the courtyard and keeping watch on them the entire time, the doctors performed their analysis of the ingredients far faster than imagined. On the dusk of that day, the doctors and the managers of the Tang clan in charge of transportation and local products finally obtained an preliminary conclusion.

Where the ingredients were produced, where they were transported, where they passed through, which places they could be found, how much was used in Tianliang County over the course of a single year—countless pieces of information were gathered together. Accompanied by the clacking of the abacus, they became numbers on the paper. Finally, they pointed to an extremely remarkable place on the map.

This place was in the northeast of Tianliang County. It was a sparsely inhabited and frigid place. Amongst the mountains was a small village called Gaoyang that had practically been abandoned.

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On the other side of the inn wall, within the Sacred Hospital, as the injuries of the wounded within gradually improved, the atmosphere gradually relaxed.

The atmosphere in the room at the very back was still oppressive and gloomy.

The young array master had still not awakened. His once-dark skin was now a pale white, his breathing short and feeble.

An Hua sat by the window, deeply exhausted, her eyes closed in rest.

Under the orders of the Mount Song Army headquarters, she and the clerics and doctors of the Sacred Hospital had expended great efforts in treating the array master. What they could be certain of now was that the young array master could last for seven days, two more days than the cleric's initial assessment. Naturally, she was the reason for this.

The Sacred Light technique of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green was no weaker than the divine arts of the Li Palace, otherwise Holy Maiden Xu Yourong would not have chosen the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green as her place of study.

But it was still not enough, because...the Cinnabar Pill would only appear after ten days.

The young array master was ranked first on the priority list of patients in the Mount Song Army headquarters to receive the medicine. As long as the headquarters received the pill, he would get it and be able to survive.

But An Hua knew that no matter how hard she, the clerics, or the military doctors worked, they could not help him last until that moment.

Hope seemed right before their eyes and seemed to be getting ever closer, but upon careful examination, it was still so far away.

There was always a day in which manpower would be exhausted. This was a fact that could easily cause anguish, even despair.

After concluding her meditation, An Hua opened her eyes and walked to the bed to examine the array master's current state.

Perhaps because she had gone for days without rest while constantly taking care of others, she felt that the young array master's face was becoming clearer and clearer.

How could she help him survive? Was there any other hope? Perhaps she could request an archbishop of the Li Palace to assist?

No, even if those great personages were willing to assist the young array master, they would not be able to reach this place in time. Besides, other than dispatching a considerable number of clerics and doctors to the frontlines, the Li Palace spent the rest of its time acting very subdued. From morning to dusk, from spring to autumn and then to winter, its gates were shut and under heavy guard.

And Mao Qiuyu, a Prefect of the Orthodoxy, would never so lightly step out of the Li Palace.

This state had already persisted for two years.

Because the Pope had left the capital two years ago.

No one knew where the young Pope currently was, or even if he was alive.

An Hua did not care for matters of the outside world, nor did she know of the current circumstances of the dynasty or Xuelao City. She only knew that the two had been at war for the past two years and many people had died.

The sects and noble families of the south had played an extremely important role in this war. Both the Tianhai Divine Empress and the venerable master Shang Xingzhou had regarded the confluence of the north and south with particular importance for this exact reason. The new generation of cultivators had also begun to formally step onto history's stage, with the youths of the Mount Li Sword Sect, Scholartree Manor, and the Six Ivies having the most outstanding performance.

Of course, compared to that person's first appearance on the battlefield, the rest of those youths could only be said to be playing house and simply weren't worth mentioning.

Although they were all youths, there was still a difference.

That was the first time he had appeared before the people's eyes after leaving the capital, and also the last time.

It had been a refreshing autumn day. Cavalry charged to and fro and smoke rose up from all sides.

His one thousand swords attacked as one. Countless demons bled their green blood and died, transforming the plains into a sea of blood.

Amongst the confusion, a weighty Qi like the mountains or seas emerged as Demon General Hai Di struck with all his power, tearing apart the clouds and the earth, causing the entire world to change.

The young Pope, heavily wounded, collapsed and then vanished.

It was like he had done this deed, appeared before so many people, taken such a massive risk, killed so many demons, bled so much blood, received such heavy injuries, all to tell a few people in the world a single thing: 'I am still alive.'

This was truly like a small child playing house.

Chapter 752 – Nothing More Than Playing House (II)

An Hua's eyes glowed as she imagined the Pope on the battlefield, reverentially praising him in her heart as truly extraordinary. As a member of the Orthodoxy, she was particularly proud of the Pope, so caught up in her mood that she failed to notice that the young array master on the bed had opened his eyes to a slit, revealing a rather gloomy gaze.

The courtyard outside the window was a little restless. The general had come to the Sacred Hospital, bringing news that was difficult to identify as true or false.

A place called Gaoyang Village might have Cinnabar Pills. Why? Because the mysterious person who refined the Cinnabar Pills was in that village.

The question that the entire continent had wanted to resolve had suddenly received an answer. For a moment, An Hua found this difficult to accept, and even after she calmed down, she still found it impossible to believe. But this young array master had only seven days left to live, and only three days were needed to travel from the Mount Song Army headquarters to Gaoyang Village. At least from a numbers perspective, there was still some hope.

She gave the array master a glance of pity, then said, "Even if it's fake, I still want to take a look."

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When one traveled a great distance south from the Mount Song Army headquarters, one would still end up in Tianliang County, but the scenery of Hanqiu City was clearly much better to look at. The only point of regret was that the famous manor on the city outskirts had still been unable to regain its past glory. To the east and west of the replanted willows was a green plain that looked like it had been eaten by a flock of sheep.

Two years ago, Zhu Luo was killed by Divine General Han Qing in the Mausoleum of Books, depriving the Zhu clan and the Emotion-Severing Sect of the protection of a Divine Domain expert. Neither was as mighty as it was before, but the Zhu clan had operated in Tianliang County for more than a thousand years and the Imperial Court owed them a favor. Adding on the fact that they had a very close relationship with the Prince of Xiang, other than gradually handing over control of Xunyang City to the Liang Household, all of Tianliang County still remained under the Zhu clan's control, and no one even dared to challenge the Zhu clan's status in Hanqiu City.

But Zhu Ye was clearly in a poor mood. Seeing the plains of grass on both sides of the river, his eyes revealed a sign of disgust and hatred.

He was the Sect Master of the Emotion-Severing Sect and master of the Zhu clan, and it could even be said that he had gained the vast majority of Zhu Luo's legacy. Everyone knew that he was not Zhu Luo's son, rather his nephew, but since he had been able to

reign so peacefully over Hanqiu City until now, one could understand that he must be very powerful, or at least very vicious.

"I don't like looking at a vast stretch of scorched earth, but I even more detest this view that looks like it's been treated with a poor herbal paste. A method must be found to treat it."

Zhu Ye raised the wine cup in his hands in greeting to the person across from him, then added, "If there's a good medicine, I naturally won't mind putting out a little strength."

The person drinking across from him was a general whose body exuded a powerful Qi. It was obvious that he had surpassed the upper level of Star Condensation.

Ning Shiwei, Divine General of Mount Song, had absolutely no background and a wooden personality. In the past, because he was unhappy with the Divine Empress, he had been ranked rather low amongst the Great Zhou's Divine Generals and did not possess much of a reputation, despite the fact that he was strong and skilled in commanding troops. After the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, he received a decree to return to the capital, upon which he completed a few major tasks and received the favor of the Prince of Xiang and the esteemed master of the Dao.

When Wang Po was severing his arm to break through, he had been one of the two Divine Generals on the bank of the Luo River that had attempted to kill him but had been stopped by Xiao Zhang's spear.

Perhaps it was for precisely this reason that he assumed the blame for this failure and was forced to leave the capital for the Mount Song Army headquarters.

The Mount Song Army headquarters was naturally much more powerful than his previous position, and he knew that the Imperial Court was showing him kindness, but he was still not satisfied. If not for the fact that the Tang Second Master had indicated his dissatisfaction for Ning Shiwei's performance, he could have remained in the capital and received an even more important position, like replacing Xu Shiji.

In his two years in the Mount Song Army headquarters, he had thought of many things, so he very quickly understood what Zhu Ye meant with his incomprehensible words.

That pill could regrow bones and save the dying, so it could naturally act like the spring breeze, making green once more the scorched black earth of the Myriad Willows Garden.

Of course, Zhu Ye would not actually use the pill to water the ground. He was just using the state of the garden as a description for something very similar to what he wanted.

Ning Shiwei wanted that pill for his personal advancement while the Zhu clan wanted the pill to regain its might, so why couldn't the two sides work together?

"The Imperial Court has let the Tang clan get away with enough, and those merchants from Wenshui are getting more and more

arrogant and forgetting how to behave properly. They truly do need to be taught a little lesson."

He added, "I will be sending some people. If Sect Master is interested, we can travel together."

Zhu Ye placed down his cup and said very casually, "I will personally go."

Ning Shiwei realized that this matter was more important than he had imagined. If the frontlines were not too tense, he felt that he should also go and take a look around that small village.

"I will go and see," a voice spoke out from the side.

The speaker was a young lordling. In the cold weather, he was waving around a folding fan, making his originally charming appearance seem rather cold and harsh.

"Although I don't believe that this medicine is as important as all of you say, I'm still very curious."

The youth was called Tianhai Zhanyi and he was the Princess of Ping's younger brother. Thus, he was also Prince Chen Liu's brother-in-law, and Prince Chen Liu was the Prince of Xiang's son. The relationship between the Tianhai clan and the Zhu clan had always been awful, like fire and water. 'Zhu Luo will not enter the capital' had become a saying in the Great Zhou Dynasty. But as it was often said, time passes and circumstances change. The Divine

Empress had died, and Zhu Luo had also died, so the wariness and hatred between the two clans had become irrelevant, a marginalized fear. As a result, through their connection with the Prince of Xiang, the two clans had been able to join hands.

Zhu Ye chuckled at Tianhai Zhanyi, but said nothing.

Between Tianhai Shengxue and Tianhai Zhanyi, everyone knew just where the power and resources of the Tianhai clan would ultimately fall upon. When he compared Tianhai Zhanyi to Tianhai Shengxue, who was highly appreciated by many military officials, Ning Shiwei found himself very unhappy with Tianhai Zhanyi. This youth was too gloomy, giving the impression that he was harsh and cold.

It might have been for just this reason that he did not refuse, instead asking, "Has His Highness already confirmed that it is that person?"

Tianhai Zhanyi folded his fan and lightly tapped it against his palm, smirking as he asked, "You're not afraid, are you? His Highness said that that person should be in the south. But I think differently from the rest of you. If that medicine really does have to do with that person, I really do hope to see him there..."

He got up and left, not expressing his full meaning.

As he watched the youth's figure gradually disappear into the willows and the setting sun, Zhu Ye commented, "If one walks too fast, it's easier to get into trouble."

"On the battlefield, young people like him always die very quickly, and it's been a long time since my youth."

Ning Shiwei added, "So I know nothing but the fact that a young array master is about to die."

"At such a time, if someone were to suddenly find out where the Cinnabar Pill was coming from, one would naturally think of a way to find it."

"Correct, nothing could be better than if he can survive."

"General truly treats his soldiers like his own children."

"Everything is due to the kindness of the great figures within the Imperial Court."

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On the map, Gaoyang Village was a small dot amongst the mountains and plains. In the records, Gaoyang Village was a long-abandoned fort. Only when An Hua and her group arrived did they discover that the small dot on the map was a massive and ancient building at the base of the mountains, and the village was actually quite lively and inhabited.

The revival of Gaoyang was completely due to the war between the humans and demons. Due to the frequent battles breaking out on the northern extremities of the snowy plains, the weapons transported to the frontlines on the northeast border of Tianliang County would mostly pass through the reopened military road winding through the mountains, and Gaoyang Village was situated right where this road exited Mount Han.

The current Gaoyang was very lively, even bustling. All along the streets were soldiers and merchant stalls, and also quite a few gaily-dressed women.

When even brothels were present, there were naturally inns as well. The military officer leading the group lifted the stretcher carrying the young array master and went to the backyard while An Hua brought two female students to the second floor of the inn, intending to get some food and also inquire on a few things. Before they even had time to sit, their gazes were attracted by a father and his daughter.

This father and daughter were a pair of musicians. The father was dressed in an old scholar's robe and hugging a zither. His head was lowered, making it difficult to see his face.

His daughter was about twelve or thirteen, with a clear and elegant appearance. She was still rather childish, and the distance between her two eyes was a little wide, making her seem a little dull.

Chapter 753 – Green Plums and the Fire of a Stove

An Hua noticed this musician father and daughter because she noticed several rather strange details.

The zither player's gown was very old, and it did not bear any signs that it was often washed, yet it was abnormally clean. Even more strange was that although snow was falling outside and the streets had turned to slurry, the shoes on his feet were untouched, looking just like new.

There was also that elegant little girl. She did not carry around any of the usual timidity or self-pity that normal musician girls had. She just quietly sat in the corner, her head slightly raised, her eyes a little dull. The cold indifference on her face, which could also be understood as a disdain for everything around her, made her seem estranged from the world.

This was not an ordinary father and daughter pair of musicians, at least not one that might commonly be seen elsewhere.

An Hua was just thinking of these words when a crisp and moving sound was plucked from the zither by the middle-aged scholar's finger, and before it could fade away, more notes followed like the gurgling of a stream.

What followed next was the girl's singing voice. The girl's voice was pleasant to hear, but also rather unusual. On the final syllable, her tongue would slightly curl as if wanting to swallow back down

that last syllable, but this did not make her words unclear, nor did it make her singing feel dull and boring. On the contrary, it made her seem like a peerless beauty behind a curtain of beads.

An Hua had lived in the capital for many years and had listened to many wondrous songs, but she had never heard such a song before. To her surprise, she lost herself in the song, momentarily forgetting the oddities from before.

After the song concluded, the second floor of the inn was quiet for a very long time before the crowd remembered to applaud and cheer. The applause and cheers were not particularly fervent, but this was not because the crowd felt that the father and daughter had performed poorly. Rather it was because everyone, including An Hua, found this haunting tune to be unforgettable and so could not help but halt their applause.

The father and daughter did not rise to bow or express their thanks, not even making attempts to take money. They just quietly sat in the corner of the room.

The father adjusted the zither strings while the girl remained expressionless.

An Hua ordered her maids to bring the girl over, wanting to ask her a few questions.

The girl ignored her entreaties, continuing to stare out the window. Her eyes were unfocused, making it difficult to tell what she was looking at.

An Hua was somewhat saddened, but with her warm personality, she did not feel like she had been spurned. She called over the inn waiter and asked a few questions, discovering that this pair of musicians had only come to Gaoyang Village yesterday. The father was a mute and the daughter also had a few problems. Apparently, she had some sort of strange illness.

An Hua stood up and walked to the corner. She smiled in greeting to the mute zither player, then crouched down by the girl and took her hand.

She was a teacher of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green, so was extremely skilled at the Sacred Light technique and medical skills. By simply taking her hand, she had already begun taking the girl's pulse. As she sensed the pulse through her fingers, her brow slightly creased. She realized that there truly was a problem with this girl, and it was a very complex problem that had probably already inflicted great harm on the girl's sea of consciousness.

She raised her head to look at the girl.

The girl was still looking out the window.

An Hua's gaze examined the girl's profile.

Other than her eyes being somewhat widely spaced, there was nothing wrong with her face. She was very good-looking; one could even consider her astonishingly beautiful.

For such a beautiful girl to be somewhat retarded was truly a pity.

An Hua felt a deep sympathy for the girl. She took a purse from her sleeve, intending to secretly pass it to the girl.

There were a few silver pieces in this purse.

At this point, the girl looked away from the window and at An Hua.

A few seconds had passed since An Hua had taken her hand. The girl's reaction truly was rather slow.

But An Hua would no longer think this, or perhaps it was better to say that she would no longer dare to think this.

Because she saw the girl's eyes.

At such a close distance, she finally understood that the girl's eyes were not dull, but calm.

Her aura was not one of estrangement, but an arrogance that was deeply rooted in her bones.

Other than the drifting snow, no other thing or matter in this world could disturb her heart, disrupt her calm.

Upon seeing the girl's eyes, An Hua suddenly felt like all the snow outside was surging within, piercing through her clothes and flesh and falling straight upon her sea of consciousness.

It was like grass encountering an endless snowstorm, an ant encountering a giant.

Her body became extremely cold and stiff. She couldn't even move a finger.

She even felt like her sea of consciousness was on the verge of being frozen, that she was about to noiselessly die.

It was at this moment that the girl saw the purse in An Hua's hand.

The girl slowly nodded, her movement so subtle that it would be impossible to notice without careful observation.

She turned back and looked out the window once more.

The violent blizzard ceased, the giant indifferently looking down upon her vanished, and An Hua finally felt the warmth of the real world once more.

Her body was no longer stiff. It could move, so she no longer dared to stay. She got her maids and quickly went downstairs.

When she reached the first floor of the inn, she realized that her clothes were completely soaked in sweat.

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An Hua did not speak of this matter to anyone, not the general leading their group or the Sacred Hospital steward surnamed Yang. This was because she had an intense understanding that she had almost discovered some secret and died. Since she was still alive, she could continue to keep treating the matter as a secret.

This had been the girl's unspoken demand.

When she returned to the backyard and heard the general say that it was best to head out immediately, her fear allowed her no objection, and she only asked a few questions.

"Has the specific location been confirmed?"

"Headquarters has had people investigating the source of the ingredients for two days. It should be correct."

There was a medicine store in Gaoyang Village, and based on the reports from the scouts, many ingredients would be transported to the store, and then be transported out of the town in the middle of the night, their ultimate destination unknown. It was evident that the master of the Cinnabar Pill had chosen Gaoyang Village because transportation was convenient and they could acquire any sort of herb or ingredient they required.

On the afternoon of the same day, the general, An Hua, her maids, Master Yang, several dozen soldiers, and the young array master on the stretcher set out to seek the medicine.

After leaving Gaoyang Village, they left the official and military roads and headed deeper into the mountains, where the path was gradually immersed in snow. Though no longer a muddy slurry, it was still just as difficult to walk in.

The deeper they headed into the mountains, the more quiet and beautiful their surroundings became. The faint steam of hot springs could be seen rising from between the pine trees.

If not for the war, this place would have become a famous tourist spot.

The warmth of twilight completely vanished and darkness descended. By the starlight, the group arduously advanced forward. At some point, they reached their destination.

There was a small courtyard nestled deep within the mountains.

A stream of water wound its way around the courtyard, steam rising from it. It had probably been drained off from the hot spring.

Due to the warmth of the land, the area around the small courtyard was still brimming with life even in the winter. So close to the waters of the hot spring, nature took on the appearance of all four seasons.

Growing along the wall of the courtyard were a cluster of onions and a bamboo forest. In front of the courtyard, flowers bloomed, and trees shedding their leaves grew in front of the half-arch windows.

Of course, the vast majority of the area was still in the grip of winter, like the small snow-covered lake.

There was a pavilion on the snowy lake, draped in curtains. The figures of two people could faintly be spotted within.

A gust of wind raised the curtains.

Within the pavilion, a stove sat on a fire, with several plum branches serving as fuel.

A man and a girl sat across from each other, the stove in between them.

This girl had a childish face, was clothed in black, and exuded an

aura of cold.

The man was rather young, his eyes clean.

Neither the snow nor the plums could match up to their cleanliness.

My editor told me that he doesn't trust zither players anymore.

Chapter 754 – In the End, Red Stew Is Still Just Meat

The setting was a dark and snowy night, a pavilion on the lake, green plums and an earthen stove, with two people sitting across from each other, drinking tea. All in all, it imbued the scene with an elegant and unearthly quality.

Over the past several days, An Hua had imagined that person to be like an aloof noble that disdained worldly things. Now when she saw the scene on the snowy lake, she felt that all was as it should be.

At this moment, the young man in the pavilion raised the cup in his hand and took a sip.

The night breeze had lifted up the curtains, and it had also carried the scent of the liquid within the cup. The crowd was somewhat surprised, because they could smell that the cup was not filled with tea, but wine. To drink wine on a snowy night is still rather elegant, An Hua thought to herself. She bowed deferentially to the pavilion and then raised her head, intending to say something, but she discovered that the young man had disappeared.

The black-clothed girl had also left the table and was now standing near the railing.

Her gaze rested on the lakeshore, as if she was looking at An Hua's group, but also like she was looking even farther away. In

the dim light of the snowy night and the mists rising from the lake, her appearance seemed both more vivid and more indistinct. Her face was childish yet also striking in its cool elegance. She seemed like a dream or illusion, or a mountain spirit.

Upon encountering such a beautiful and ethereal girl and such a splendid garden so deep within these remote mountains, anyone would think of a few legends or stories. Even An Hua, who had grown up in the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green and possessed a brightly lit Dao heart, also could not help but fall into a momentary daze. She even felt an inexplicable sense of dread.

But she would not leave, because the young array master was still on the stretcher and might die at any moment.

The others would not leave either, as they had not obtained what they wanted to obtain yet.

"Let's go over first," the general said with a frown.

This journey to seek out medicine was never meant to succeed too smoothly. After all, it was obvious that the master of the Cinnabar Pill was not willing to let other people learn of their true identity.

The squad from the Mount Song Army headquarters stepped on the wooden bridge crossing the lake, their somewhat disorderly steps breaking the silence.

The black-clothed girl seemed unaware. She looked at some point in the night sky, her cold and sublime face utterly devoid of emotion.

Borrowing the dim light of the stars and lanterns, An Hua noticed that the lake beneath the bridge was boiling with tiny bubbles. When they popped, they would condense into the mist that covered the lake. The mist was moist and warm, and it was obvious that the lake's waters came from the hot spring. There was even a chance that there was a crack in the ground at the very bottom of the lake.

When the group entered the pavilion, the black-clothed girl still did not turn around. She continued to look out as if these uninvited guests had not disturbed the mood she had gained from drinking wine on a snowy night.

Or perhaps these people simply didn't exist in her eyes, even if those people were already right in front of her.

An Hua was preparing to bow to her again, but then she smelled something. She subconsciously turned to the earthen stove, and her body went stiff, her face revealing an expression of disbelief.

The earthen stove was very delicate, not more than a foot tall. Even when placed on the table, it did not seem too tall. A clay pot was placed on top of the stove, the pot bubbling and gurgling about like the lake surrounding the pavilion.

The wine was in a little pot decorated with carved plum

blossoms. Anything would be thoroughly chilled by the wind and snow, so the stove was not heating wine, nor brewing tea, but rather making stew.

The pot on the stove was making stewed lamb meat.

Compared to brewing tea on a snowy night, this was admittedly less elegant, but it was not enough to shock An Hua so.

What shocked her, and what had even caused her to reveal a little heartache on her face, was that she could very clearly smell the scent of many medicinal ingredients in the lamb stew.

Angelica, gouji berry, cloves, golden eye grass, goat weed...

From this lamb stew, she could smell quite a few ingredients, and these were ingredients that she had smelled from a certain pill.

That Master Yang, who was newly arrived to the Sacred Hospital, had an even more unsightly expression.

Because his true identity was Doctor Yang, the doctor from Wenshui City who was employed by the Tang clan, and he had once personally analyzed this pill.

He was incredibly sure that the thirty-four ingredients mixed into this pot of lamb stew were the ingredients used to make the Cinnabar Pill! He turned once more to the black-clothed girl standing at the edge of the pavilion, and his eyes narrowed into

cold blades, carrying a deep-rooted malice and fury, just like the words oozing out from between his teeth.

"Truly an extravagant way of doing things!"

To possess such a beautiful garden and pavilion so deep in the mountains and in the winter meant the owner was naturally unusual, not some ordinary wealthy scion.

But none of these facts was as shocking as this pot of lamb stew.

"What's wrong?" the general grimly asked after seeing the strange expression of the two.

Before An Hua had time to say anything, Master Yang lunged to the table, took up a pair of chopsticks, and rummaged through the leftover lamb stew in the pot. He then poured out a cup of wine, brought it to his nose, and sniffed it.

With just a single sniff, Master Yang's face went as red as the lamb stew in the pot.

He was not drunk, but furious. His angry body was trembling all over, causing the wine in the cup to spill out, just like the furious question spilling from his mouth.

"This is a reckless waste! You actually used these things that can save lives to stew meat and make wine!?"

The rest of the group finally understood and couldn't help but be shocked. The general turned gloomy while some people stared at the stew and wine pot on the table, their eyes aglow.

An Hua had already shaken off her shock, but she still felt her heartache, felt disappointment and sadness.

After learning of the Cinnabar Pill, she had made many speculations on that enigmatic master doctor. She felt that this person must be an aloof noble who disregarded the mundane world and cared not for fame, but...did such precious herbs that could help the soldiers on the frontlines escape from death and pain mean so little to this person? Was the Cinnabar Pill not a miracle that this person had painstakingly created to save all lives but some game they were playing with this world? Were they just a child playing house that ended up being mistaken for the real thing by bystanders? Did the high regard the common people gave to the Cinnabar Pill and her worship of this person not seem particularly laughable in that person's eyes?

Fine, even if it was all just a game to that person, to ordinary mortals like her who lived in the mundane world, this was still a matter that concerned life and death. An Hua gave a helpless sigh, burying her anguish, and asked the black-clothed girl, "Might I ask, is my lady the master of the Cinnabar Pill?"

The black-clothed girl turned around, but did not answer the question, instead looking at Master Yang. Master Yang, upon realizing that this lamb stew and pot of wine might have contained the Cinnabar Pill, was completely caught up in the emotions of

fury and incredulity and didn't even notice her stare.

No one could tell what the black-clothed girl was feeling. That young and elegant face of hers was forever devoid of emotion, an ancient slab of ice. Her voice was similarly chilling, but the meaning in her words was completely opposite of ice, brimming with passion, even rage. Of course, there was also a sense of absolute incredulity.

"Those filthy hands of yours actually dared to touch my sacred and inviolable wine and meat...this is truly a praiseworthy deed."

Everyone, An Hua included, was flabbergasted at these words, not understanding what she meant. Master Yang finally came to his senses and looked at her in astonishment.

The black-clothed girl's eyes became exceptionally bright as she said, "I haven't eaten human meat for a very long time. Thank you for giving me such a perfect reason."

Chapter 755 – The Broken Bridge Is Surrounded by People

No one other than demons ate human flesh.

Even humans with such perversions would only do so in private. They certainly wouldn't publicly announce it, and say it with such a proud expression.

The black-clothed girl's words were absurd and sounded just like a joke. Logically speaking, it could only have been a joke, but no one in the pavilion was laughing. That was because this was a place deep in the mountains, far from human habitation, late in the snowy night on a lake. This was a place where strange stories most often occurred, and she spoke with a most serious expression.

Fear and unease enveloped the snowy pavilion, occupying the hearts of everyone present. Shame was liable to make people angry, and the same could be said for fear, because both these emotions forced one to face the weaknesses of one's heart. That Master Yang had originally planned to explain himself, but when he opened his mouth, all that came out was harsh scolding as his shame transformed to anger.

"Is what I said not correct? These medicinal ingredients are for saving lives, but they've been used by you two to satisfy the cravings of your tongues! What you're eating is human flesh! What you're drinking is human blood!"

"What you've said is naturally correct." The black-clothed girl's

still-childish features were ice-cold as she said, "Because it's my nature to eat human flesh and drink human blood."

As her words fell, a pained howl ripped through the pavilion. Master Yang's hand had been cut off at the wrist!

Accompanied by shouts of fear and sparkling beads of blood sprinkling the night sky, the severed hand was seized by an invisible force and floated over to the black-clothed girl.

She looked at the hand, her brows slightly raised. For the moment, she made no movement as she seemed to ponder something.

Everyone stared at this bloody sight in fear, thinking to themselves, is she really going to eat that hand?

An Hua noticed that the girl had a particularly solemn and grave expression, cautious and focused, even somewhat sacred.

This made her feel a boundless fear, and her body became incredibly cold, as this sight made her recall the girl that she had made in that inn in Gaoyang Village today.

"Stop messing around," a voice said from the lake shore.

The young man who had suddenly vanished a few moments ago was walking back along the bridge.

This person's appearance caused the oppressive, tense, and terrified mood within the pavilion to greatly relax.

Perhaps it was because of his gentle tone, or the harmless feeling given off by his clean and delicate face.

The black-clothed girl angrily said, "Just how am I messing around? That was the lamb stew that you made for me, but how can I eat it after it was touched by that man's filthy hands?"

The young man stopped outside the pavilion and said to her, "But does that mean that you have to eat his hand?"

The girl said in a huff, "I don't care! I just want to eat human flesh! I originally ate human flesh, so why can't I eat it now?"

The young man somewhat helplessly said, "You tried it two years ago and found out you didn't like it, so why are you so obsessed with the idea now?"

The girl snorted and said, "Is the me that can't eat human flesh still me?"

"Now, now. You just said yourself that this hand is very filthy. Quickly throw it away," the young man said to her. There was an extremely fine hint of pampering in his voice, but it was mostly helplessness, concern, responsibility, and obligation. It was like an elder speaking to a junior, but with a somewhat timid feeling that

was very strange.

This conversation was also very weird. Just a moment ago, had they been discussing eating human flesh in public?

They all felt this sight to be absurd, but other than Master Yang, who was about to fall unconscious from the pain, everyone hoped that the young man would be able to convince the black-clothed girl.

No one wanted to suffer from bad dreams for the rest of their life.

The girl was clearly not happy, but she ultimately obeyed the command and threw the hand into the lake.

Upon seeing this, everyone finally relaxed.

"I know what all of you want, but I really have no way to give it to you. And also..."

The young man's gaze fell on An Hua's face. "The lamb stew and the wine pot truly do contain medicinal ingredients, but they are also not what you came here for."

An Hua was already sure that the young man was the master of the Cinnabar Pill, but she didn't understand why he had insisted on speaking to her amongst all these people, so she couldn't help but be a little startled.

The young man continued, "I'm not so extravagant a person. If this meat and wine could save lives, I naturally wouldn't use them to satisfy my appetite."

An Hua felt increasingly confused. This person was certainly no ordinary individual, and there was no need for him to explain anything to an ordinary teacher from the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green. And when she saw Master Yang softly groaning in pain, her confusion was once more replaced by grief. She said, "But in the end, the two of you are still powerful figures who ignore the lives of ordinary people."

Upon seeing her serious and stubborn expression, the young man seemed to become a little absent-minded. He was probably thinking about a girl who had also once cultivated in the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green.

Perhaps this had also been the reason for his explanation to her.

"You are a pure doctor, and you are a pure soldier."

He looked at An Hua and the general respectively, and then said, "But this person is different. He is not an ordinary doctor. I could see his greed, so losing a hand is a price that he needed to pay."

Just like his previous explanation, there was no proof, only a conclusion made with his heart. It was very difficult to trust in this explanation, but upon seeing the clean and clear eyes of the young man, An Hua and the general believed it.

After this explanation, the young man regretfully said, "I didn't think that I would be found out so quickly."

The atmosphere in the pavilion once more grew tense as the soldiers tightened the grips on their blades and crossbows, their breathing becoming somewhat hurried. They thought, is he planning to get rid of us to hide his secret? If they hadn't witnessed the black-clothed girl noiselessly cut off Master Yang's hand from a distance, the soldiers might have scorned this way of thinking as an overindulgent fantasy, but now, none of them dared to think this way.

But the young man did nothing other than order to the girl to come out of the pavilion, and then turn and walk back onto the bridge.

Only now did everyone notice that he was carrying his luggage on his back. It turned out that he had vanished a few moments ago to make preparations to leave.

An Hua was a girl, so her thoughts were somewhat subtler and more numerous.

He had needed only such a short amount of time to pack his luggage. Didn't that mean that he was prepared to leave at any time?

What was he hiding from? Was it the great renown, extraordinary wealth, and endless hazards brought by the

Cinnabar Pill, or was it the world itself?

Just who was this young man? Just what sort of story did he carry with him?

The general had a mission to carry out, so he naturally would not just let the young man leave. With a harsh order, he charged out of the pavilion.

With a bang, dust plumed around the pavilion. He had been blocked by an invisible barrier and been sent crashing to the ground.

The group learned that the young man had actually laid down a seal before leaving. Perhaps there was no danger, but it was now impossible for their party to stop him.

An Hua walked to the edge of the pavilion and called out to the pair, "We just want to ask for a single Cinnabar Pill to save a life."

Without turning around, the young man replied, "I really don't have any more. The next batch will be in a few days. Return and wait for it."

An Hua called back in despair, "But he can't wait for that long."

"Many things can't be decided by us. We can only accept what is decreed to us by fate."

The young man and the black-clothed girl continued their way to the other end of the bridge, saying nothing more to them.

"In the future, don't make any more unreasonable tantrums."

"And just when did I make an unreasonable tantrum!"

"Then can you not be so ruthless? To want to eat humans at the drop of a hat is truly not very good."

"Those people stole from me! And perhaps they wanted to attack you, so of course I have to kill them. Since I'm going to kill them, why can't I just eat them as well?"

"I know you also don't want to eat it, so why force yourself..."

"Just when did I say that I didn't want to eat human flesh? I just thought that what you said was reasonable. The hand was too dirty and washing it and plucking out the hairs would be too troublesome..."

"I was just giving you a convenient excuse."

"Hey! If you say it out loud, aren't you putting me back in an awkward spot? And besides, you better understand that I was just giving you face!"

The people within the pavilion listened to this conversation and watched the pair gradually walk off into the distance with mixed feelings.

Just when they thought that everything that had happened tonight was about to become a dream, ultimately become an unforgettable yet traceless dream...

Suddenly.

The starlight and snow suddenly went mad. A massive boulder howled through the air and smashed through the wooden bridge.

The lake frothed and waves surged. Wooden splinters went flying and dust and snow covered the sky.

The wooden bridge was broken, the snowy lake in turmoil.

The young man and black-clothed girl stood on the wooden bridge, their clothes slightly soaked.

All was silent and oppressive.

Suddenly, a wind began to incessantly howl, a cold wind blowing against flames.

This was followed by the sound of metal scraping and armor clinking.

Countless torches lit up along the lakeshore, gradually illuminating the scene.

People were everywhere.

Chapter 756 – Silently Killing in the Heavy Mist

It turned out that many people had been hiding around the snowy lake.

Since they had been hiding, it naturally meant that they had arrived a long time ago.

These people were from Gaoyang Village, Xunyang City, the Mount Song Army Headquarters, Hanqiu City, and even the capital. All of them were experts.

But they were only attendants to the truly important figures.

These important figures had been standing in the darkness of the mountain range this entire time.

Tianhai Zhanyi was dressed in a thin gown, and whenever snowflakes fell upon it, they would float away. He looked very elegant.

Youths always enjoyed using various ways to display their grace and flaunt their strength, but Zhu Ye, as master of the Zhu clan, did not need to do any of this. He was dressed in a fur coat, while Divine General Ning Shiwei was still wearing a full suit of armor in this cold weather, making him seem especially stern. As Ning Shiwei surveyed the mist-covered valley below and that almost fairy-like courtyard, he wrinkled his brow and he said, "This place

is so remote and extremely close to demon territory, and yet they were able to build such a place..."

"Just who owns this place isn't important. What's important is who will be able to possess this person after tonight."

Tianhai Zhanyi glanced at the pine forest across from him, making no attempts to conceal his ridicule and contempt.

Even the stupidest of people could understand that the enigmatic individual that was able to refine such a wondrous treasure as the Cinnabar Pill was certainly no ordinary person.

But they represented the Zhu clan, the Tianhai clan, and the Prince of Xiang, essentially half of the Great Zhou Dynasty. What they needed to consider was not how to snatch away that precious recipe and the person who had developed it, but how to prevent other people from snatching these things away.

Those people were in the pine forest across from them.

The Tang Seventeenth Master smirked at them and said, "I truly did not expect that someone dares to steal the products of my Wenshui Tang clan."

From the look of it, the Tang clan had already lost control over tonight's situation. Regardless of the preparations that the Seventeenth Master had made, he probably had not expected that the important personages of the Imperial Court would so highly

value the pill recipe and that person. Despite the statuses of Zhu Ye and Ning Shiwei, they had managed to silently make their way to this obscure mountain range.

Tianhai Zhanyi looked at the Tang clan experts standing at the Seventeenth Master's side and jeered, "If your Tang clan had continued to obediently distribute the Cinnabar Pill, it truly could have remained your product, but since you've now also begun to crave this treasure, do you still have the face to stop others? To steal what's entrusted to you...is a somewhat more unpleasant way of putting it."

The Tang Seventeenth Master's smile faded. "I am representing the Tang clan in speaking with you."

From the moment they had met in this snowy mountain range, Zhu Ye had had a faint smile hanging about his face, but at these words, his smile suddenly flourished. "Wait until your second brother kills your eldest brother and then enters the ancestral hall to kill pitiful little Thirty-Six. When that day comes, it won't be too late to say that you represent the Tang clan."

Upon hearing these words which were seemingly ordinary, but actually extremely pointed and filled with contempt, the Tang Seventeenth Master took a deep breath and his gaze turned cold. This place was Tianliang County, and he was not the First Master or the Second Master, perhaps even lower in status than Tang Tang. As a result, he could only accept these words, and yet...

At this moment, Ning Shiwei suddenly turned to the courtyard in the snowy valley below and snorted, "Want to leave?"

Before his voice had faded away, his fist punched out like a cold spear, slamming against the cliff. With a boom, a chunk of the mountain was sent flying down into the valley.

Faint sounds of snapping and breaking could be heard and the lake seemed to ripple. Just like that, the wooden bridge was broken.

"Let's go and meet with that place's master."

Ning Shiwei began walking to the lake, not even glancing at the Tang Seventeenth Master.

But the Tang Seventeenth Master knew that this iron fist had been meant for him to see. It was a warning and an expression of resolve.

Tianhai Zhanyi, his face full of scorn, shook his head and walked past the Tang Seventeenth Master.

Zhu Ye calmly nodded in farewell and followed.

The former bishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons glanced in concern and confusion at the Tang Seventeenth Master, who had remained unmoving this entire time.

As he watched the torches light up along the lake shore, watched

the mist over the lake grow thicker from the turbulence, the Tang Seventeenth Master suddenly frowned.

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The boulder had shattered the wooden bridge, startling the waters of the lake and stirring up a heavy mist. The courtyard in which all four seasons had been displayed was enveloped in the mist. The dusky light of the torches was scattered to produce an extremely dream-like scene, increasing the fairy-like quality of the landscape. Of course, to someone in a different mood, one could say that it added to the strangeness of the scene.

Tianhai Zhanyi stood on the shore of the lake and looked at the two indistinct figures standing on the broken bridge. Arching his brows, he said, "Sire is naturally an extraordinary individual, strolling about with the clouds and storks, a noble person who lives apart from the world, but...how can one truly live without eating the food of the mundane world? Since one has to stain oneself with the red dust of the mortal world eventually, why not travel together with us?"

He thought these words to be extremely elegant and was quite

pleased with them, yet the answer that came back through the mist showed that they had had none of the effect that he desired.

The black-clothed girl's voice was just as emotionless as herself, but it so easily riled his emotions. "Are you a demi-human? Do you not know how to speak human words?"

Tianhai Zhanyi was absolutely infuriated at this response. With a light snort, he prepared to respond, but was stymied by a glance from Zhu Ye.

"To put it more simply, no matter what you might think, since you've been exposed to the sun, there is no more chance of returning to the darkness."

Zhu Ye calmly said to the two people within the mist, "No person can misappropriate the Cinnabar Pill. The Tang clan cannot, nor can I or anybody else. It belongs to the Imperial Court, and all we want is the merit of being the first to offer it. As for your reward, not one bit will be kept from you. There is even a chance that you will receive the gratitude of the venerable master of the Dao."

The mist was quiet for a very long time.

The young man spoke.

"This is mine."

Zhu Ye revealed a warm smile, playing the part of an elder

patiently explaining things to a junior. "When I said that no one can misappropriate the Cinnabar Pill, you were included."

In the mist, the young man asked, "What sort of principle is this?"

Zhu Ye solemnly intoned, "Since it is the most precious treasure of the world, it should belong to the entire world."

The mist fell silent once more.

Tianhai Zhanyi sneered, "If one holds a precious treasure but is not willing to share it with the world, then one should hide oneself better, or else they will just be seeking death."

Whether it was said elegantly, tactfully, or patiently, the argument of these important figures was evident.

The Cinnabar Pill was one of the most precious treasures of the world. If one did not have the appropriate strength or authority, one did not have the right to keep it. If one wanted forcefully to keep it, they could only die.

The black-clothed girl's voice rose from the mist again, responding to Tianhai Zhanyi's words. "Ah! Are you really a demi-human?"

She was still referring to the fact that he didn't know how to properly speak human words. Tianhai Zhanyi was enraged and

retorted, "Hand over the pill recipe and your life will be spared!"

As he spoke, he made a few furtive gestures behind his back.

He had no intentions of waiting for an answer. What he wanted was a surprise attack.

Zhu Ye and Ning Shiwei both saw it, and though their brows were raised, they did not stop him. They wanted to see what would happen. Even just a few probing assaults would produce some response.

An expert of the Tianhai clan silently lunged across the surface of the lake, strangely vanishing into the mist.

And then...he just vanished.

Nothing happened. No sound rose from the fog.

Time slowly passed, but the fog remained quiet, no response rising from it.

Everyone felt things to be truly odd.

Tianhai Zhanyi's complexion was abnormally unpleasant.

Zhu Ye and Ning Shiwei had both grown more solemn.

There was a sudden splash of water. The lotuses in the mist gently moved as the corpse of the Tianhai clan expert drifted out of the mist.

It was like a boat, and as it made its way through the lake, the waters were dyed a striking red.

Chapter 757 – Just Meeting Face to Face

Upon seeing the corpse lightly bobbing on the surface of the lake, Tianhai Zhanyi instantly paled, his face becoming as white as paper or snow, a bit more similar to that famous elder brother of his.

This did not mean that he was afraid, but that he was furious.

"Again!" He harshly shouted at the indistinct figure in the mist.

Several cracks could be heard in the air. There was no attempt to act stealthily this time. Several Tianhai clan experts on the shore charged across ten-some zhang to enter the thick mist.

This time, there was finally a response, a quick one at that. It was several light pops, like leather bags filled with water being pierced by sharp arrows.

Popopopop. While still in the air, the Tianhai clan experts shattered, transforming into an uncountable number of fleshy bits raining down.

The lake was instantly dyed even redder, and the waves roiled about in unease.

The mist gave no sign that it would disperse. It remained thick, and the young man and girl inside were still indistinct, making it impossible to see what exactly they had done.

Ning Shiwei and Zhu Ye exchanged grave looks, seeing the wariness in each other's minds. They knew that the enigmatic master of the Cinnabar Pill could be no ordinary person, and it was because they had mentally prepared themselves for this fact that they had personally come to this remote mountain range. Yet they still had not imagined that this person possessed such an unfathomable cultivation, such strange and inexplicable techniques. What was even more frightening was his cruel and unyielding will.

They couldn't help but think, did the Tang clan retreat just before all this happened because they knew more and wanted to use our group as a vanguard?

It was just like how they had secretly sent that group in the pavilion.

But at the present moment, it was too late for them to make any more plans.

"You are seeking death!" Tianhai Zhanyi was so angry that his body was shaking. "Fire arrows!" he harshly yelled.

Ning Shiwei said nothing. He looked with an indifferent expression at the mist, the frost on his armor instantly thickening.

The sounds of bowstrings being pulled back could be heard from the forest surrounding the lake. One-hundred-some of the most unyielding divine crossbows of the Mount Song Army aimed at

those figures deep within the mist.

Zhu Ye also said nothing. His eyes slightly narrowed, and the hairs of his fur coat began to rise, stabbing at the night sky. He seemed just like a fierce tiger preparing to leap across a stream at its prey.

He and Ning Shiwei were both well aware that the hundred-some divine crossbows of the Mount Song Army were not necessarily enough to deal with the young man and girl inside the heavy mists. On the contrary, it was far more likely to stir up their vicious natures. If the pair wanted to kill their way out of the encirclement, they would have to attack with full power. Thus, total victory today would be decided by a single meeting.

With this meeting, the battle would come to an end. Naturally, neither side could go easy on the other and would have to use all their power.

Zhu Ye and Ning Shiwei seemed normal on the surface, but in reality, they had already begun to silently move true essence, raising their Qi to its peak state, intending to kill or subdue their opponents in a single strike.

One was the patriarch of the Zhu clan, the other was a Divine General of the Great Zhou, and both were unquestionably upper level Star Condensation experts. The hundred-some divine crossbows and their two determined strikes would make even experts of the Proclamation of Liberation like Xiao Zhang or Liang Wangsun retreat, let alone this young man and girl.

Just as they had prepared themselves to strike at any moment, a cool breeze came blowing by.

This mountain range was in the extreme north, very close to the land of demons, and it was currently midwinter, so the wind blowing through the mountains was naturally incredibly cold, even bone-piercing. However, this garden and the pavilion on the lake were located at a confluence of hot springs, so even the coldest and strongest wind would be robbed of its iciness when it struck the lake, transforming into a cool breeze.

This cool breeze ruffled the lotus leaves on the lake and the clothes on the corpse. The thick mists, which had seemed impossible to disperse, greatly lessened.

Starlight descended from the night sky, reflecting endlessly off the white snow shrouding the wilderness and illuminating the scene on the lake with great clarity.

This place was a garden in the extreme north, the mountains and lakes creating a nice contrast, the trees and flowers sheltering the courtyard. There were lotuses on the lake, and amongst the lotuses was a pavilion. Extending from north to south was a wooden bridge connecting the shore to the pavilion. At this moment, the bridge was broken.

The starlight shone upon the place where the bridge had been broken, first shining upon a hand.

It was a very small hand, a pure white like white jade. At this moment, however, it was covered in blood.

The black-clothed girl was looking at her own hand with her brows knit, her small mouth slightly agape, and her clove-like tongue faintly visible. She seemed to be hesitating on whether she should lick her hand or not.

At her side, the young man had his head lowered as he used a handkerchief to wipe the water off his body. He had probably been soaked by the splashes of water caused by that boulder shattering the bridge.

Afterwards, he passed the handkerchief to the girl, most likely wanting her to clean off the blood on her hand.

Silence.

Whether it was the people sealed in the pavilion or the people on the shore, they all saw this sight, their emotions complex as they silently watched.

The people within the pavilion were silent because they had probably figured out their role in this plan. The soldiers and experts on the shore were silent because they were shocked to see that their opponents really were a young man and a girl. Although they had rather handsome appearances, there seemed nothing special about them.

What was confusing was that Ning Shiwei and Zhu Ye had been quiet up until they got a direct view of the young man's face.

In a very brief period of time, their faces shifted through all sorts of expressions, as if they had seen something utterly inconceivable. Finally, they squeezed a sound from their lips.

This was a very complicated and strange sound. It was like a sigh, but also felt helpless and somewhat in pain, and also like a groan.

Then, their bodies suddenly sank into the ground.

It was not too deep, only half a foot.

Their feet dug into the lake shore.

Two powerful and terrifying Qis exploded from their bodies.

Countless pieces of earth and stone were sent shooting into the air like arrows.

The soldiers and Emotion-Severing Sect experts somewhat closer to them were rendered into bloody paste while those standing farther away were injured and began howling out in pain.

The crossbow bolts that were about to be unleashed disappeared in the ensuing chaos.

Ning Shiwei's armor was covered in dust, but his face was unpleasantly ashen.

Zhu Ye was constantly coughing, seemingly in so much pain that he was bent over.

Just what had happened?

Tianhai Zhanyi's mood was similarly in chaos.

His cultivation level was not high enough, but he was still a descendant of a noble clan who had received a good education and seen many experts. As a result, he was able to understand what was going on.

Just a moment ago, Zhu Ye and Ning Shiwei had brought their Qis to their peak state, allowing them to cleave mountains or tear apart clouds with a single movement.

But just like the great river ever flows east, if they wanted to stop themselves at such a moment, they would have to pay the corresponding price.

In normal times, they could have just gradually dispersed this, but for some reason, they had needed to do it immediately, so a few problems had occurred. Although the vast majority of the Qi had been forcefully poured into the earth, they had still been shaken by the aftershocks.

Just how frightening was the peak state of two peak Star Condensation experts? Even if it was just the aftershocks.

Thus, the entire scene was in chaos, and they had also suffered significant injuries.

Tianhai Zhanyi understood what was going on, but this made him even more confused as to what was going on.

Why had Zhu Ye and Ning Shiwei suddenly dispersed their Qis? And why had they done it with such resolve?

After all, they were no ordinary cultivators, but the master of a noble clan and a valued general, both truly formidable characters!

When they exploded with battle intent, even if their own sons were standing across from them, they would still strike against them just the same!

Yet when they saw the young man's face, they knew that they couldn't strike. It was to the extent that even if they had to kill their own trusted subordinates and risk injuring themselves, they still had to immediately let the young man know that they would not strike, immediately!

Just who was the man on the bridge that could make the master of a noble clan and a Divine General of the Great Zhou so apprehensive, even fearful?

Immediately after, Tianhai Zhanyi finally thought of who the young man might be.

His face instantly paled, maybe out of anger, or maybe because of the boundless bewilderment and terror surging through his mind.

Chapter 758 – The Darkness Is Difficult to Disperse

At this time, if Tianhai Zhanyi were still unable to guess the identity of the master of the Cinnabar Pill, just what right would he have to compete with Tianhai Shengxue over the role of clan head?

In the Myriad Willows Garden, he had even mentioned that such a possibility existed, and if it really was that person, he was actually rather interested in meeting with them.

But how could he have expected that he would really meet that person tonight? What would he do next?

Only now did he realize that any sort of advance preparations were meaningless, because before something really took place, one often imagined oneself to have more bravery than one actually would have. He could currently do nothing, lacking even the bravery to look his opponent in the eye.

At present, very few people compared that person to the other experts of the younger generation. It wasn't because that person's strength and cultivation had far surpassed their peers, but because that person had already surpassed the bounds of a 'young genius'. They were no longer a person of the mundane world, but a true Saint.

Upon seeing the figure on the broken bridge, Tianhai Zhanyi felt his body turn as stiff as a board, and his mind filled with the

greatest longing that he had never come to this place tonight.

Zhu Ye was still coughing.

The Zhu clan head had apparently suffered far more serious injuries than imagined. His coughs were incredibly painful, his head lowered, his waist bent. He couldn't even stand straight and was coughing so hard that it must have been ruining his lungs. With great difficulty, he waved his right hand. The experts of the Emotion-Severing Sect responded, stepping forth to support him. Just like that, Zhu Ye retreated into the darkness.

When Ning Shiwei saw the face of the person on the bridge, his complexion became very unsightly. When he saw Zhu Ye retreat, his complexion turned incredibly gloomy.

He had understood.

Zhu Ye had been painfully coughing the entire time so that he didn't need to raise his head. As long as he didn't raise his head, he didn't need to see the person on the bridge, or put another way, he would not let the person on the bridge see him. In this way, Zhu Ye could pretend that he had earlier seen nothing at all and still was seeing nothing, still had not recognized that person's identity.

Ning Shiwei's response was slower than Zhu Ye's. It was impossible for him to pretend, so what should he do?

Tianhai Zhanyi also came to his senses. Watching Zhu Ye and his

entourage retreat into the darkness with unimaginable speed, he silently cursed the old fox.

The experts of the Emotion-Severing Sect had retreated with Zhu Ye, but there were still many people around the lake.

There were no longer any sounds of crossbows being drawn, or blades being unsheathed, or the scraping of metal, or the heavy sounds of breathing. All was quiet.

The crossbowmen and Tianhai clan experts had seemingly guessed at something and were currently nervous to the extreme.

They even seemed to have stopped breathing, and what was just a few brief seconds seemed like an endlessly long period of time.

That stern figure covered in armor finally kneeled towards the center of the lake.

Upon seeing this sight, everyone felt like they had just been given a new lease on life.

If he had insisted on not kneeling, then no matter how tonight ended, just how many of the several hundred people present would have been able to survive the aftermath?

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"Ning Shiwei of the Mount Song Army pays respects to His Holiness the Pope."

Ning Shiwei had kneeled in the slush of the shore.

Nearby, Tianhai Zhanyi was also kneeling with his head lowered, making it difficult to see the emotions on his face.

The scraping of metal once more broke the stillness of the lake. This dense noise was not the unsheathing of blades, but the clattering of armor.

In the snowy forests surrounding the lake, several hundred people, speaking to the person on the bridge as one, "Paying respects to His Holiness the Pope!"

Their voices were very united, but there was a slight tremble, perhaps from nervousness, excitement, or fear.

The young man was clearly somewhat uncomfortable with this. After a moment of silence, he said, "Rise."

"Many thanks to His Holiness."

There was another clattering of armor.

The young man commanded, "Disperse."

Many gazes looked to Ning Shiwei and Tianhai Zhanyi.

Tianhai Zhanyi, his face pale, kept his thin lips tightly pursed, not issuing a single word. He seemed rather gloomy and harsh, but there was finally a little of the stubbornness of youth about him.

Ning Shiwei expressionlessly said, "We solemnly comply with Your Holiness's order."

There was a clattering of metal and the sound of hurried footsteps.

The slush was stamped into mush, just like the moods of many people at this moment.

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'Disperse.'

With this simple word, everyone dispersed.

The torches vanished and the starlight regained its grandeur. The darkness thickened, and all was quiet.

In an instant, the lake returned to its undisturbed appearance. The only people left were the young man and girl on the broken bridge and the people in the pavilion who couldn't leave.

The young man was naturally the two-years-missing Chen Changsheng and the black-clothed girl was the little Black Dragon. She had a name now: 'Zhusha'.

The snowy lake was beautiful and silent. Chen Changsheng gazed at the lotuses on the lake as he silently pondered over a few things.

Someone had used the Cinnabar Pill to track him down. This was very normal.

Those people had discovered that he was the master of the Cinnabar Pill, and so had decided not to fight and swiftly retreated. This was also normal.

Probably only a madman like Xiao Zhang would dare to attack the current Pope in front of so many people.

But for those two normal things to happen together was abnormal.

It was evident that both the people in the pavilion and the people that had just left had all been used by someone.

It seemed like tonight's matter had yet to come to a close.

The lake was very quiet, as if nothing had happened. There was no boulder falling from the sky, no experts surrounding the lake, no people being killed in the mist, and no blood-stained lake or almost-released rain of arrows. But the bridge was still broken, the lake was still red, and those people had still come, so it was no longer convenient to remain here.

He glanced at Zhusha.

Zhusha rolled her eyes. She was still a Black Frost Dragon, so even as a little girl, the effect of her rolling her eyes was still rather unusual. When rolling her monstrous eyes with their vertical pupils, they seemed particularly white, and her mood was expressed with particular clarity. But she still complied with his intentions and removed the seal over the pavilion.

The general brought his group out of the pavilion and prostrated himself on the ground, not daring to speak.

An Hua was extremely agitated, but her manners were still pristine and she acted with great piety. But when she thought of her earlier rudeness to the Pope, she couldn't help but get nervous.

As for Doctor Yang, who had lost his hand, his face was pale and fear ruled his heart. He thought to himself, I'm probably doomed.

"Leave as quickly as possible. Something will happen here soon,

and I might not be able to protect you when that time comes."

Chen Changsheng did not turn around, but kept his eyes fixed on a certain place in the mountains.

There was an endless darkness that seemed to conceal an endless danger.

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In a certain place in the snowy mountain range, the Tang Seventeenth Master was also looking at this same darkness.

The former bishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons and the other subordinates that had come from Wenshui were all looking towards the Seventeenth Master with great reverence. At this time, they naturally knew that the Tang Seventeenth Master had known the Cinnabar Pill master's identity a long time ago. When he had been suppressed by Tianhai Zhanyi and Zhu Ye, he had naturally been putting on an act.

He was truly worthy of being a master of the Tang clan, as his methods were truly steady and shrewd. If this was a plan to borrow a knife to commit murder, then the Tang Seventeenth Master had assuredly borrowed the world's fastest knife. Even if Zhu Ye and his group had reacted very quickly, even if Chen Changsheng was still as gentle as he had been in the past, if the Li

Palace were to learn of this matter, how could the Orthodoxy just let the matter go?

But why was there no sense of accomplishment on the Tang Seventeenth Master's face? Why was his expression so grave?

Chapter 759 – The Other Side of the Mountains

Translated by: Hypersheep325

In a certain place in the snowy mountain range, a small hole was torn in the heavy darkness by the light of torches.

Tianhai Zhanyi stared at Zhu Ye, his complexion abnormally nasty. Angry and ashamed to the extreme, he asked, "We're just leaving like this?"

Zhu Ye impassively replied, "In the Myriad Willows Garden on that day, just who was it that said that person was in the south?"

Tianhai Zhanyi shut up.

On that day, he had been relaying the words of the Prince of Xiang. The words of this powerful and lofty imperial prince represented the thoughts of the Great Zhou Dynasty. The Imperial Court had always believed that Chen Changsheng was hiding in the south—if not in Holy Maiden Peak then in Scholartree Manor. Nobody had anticipated that he was in this mountain range, and that he was also the master of the Cinnabar Pill...

Ning Shiwei turned to Zhu Ye, his gaze relaying a silent question.

"There are too many people."

Zhu Ye's answer was simple, but contained many unspoken words.

Although they were already very far from the garden, they were still not far enough. They needed to be at least a thousand li away, so Zhu Yu spoke very carefully.

Ning Shiwei and Tianhai Zhanyi both understood.

There were too many people, so they had to leave. If there were fewer people, would tonight have ended differently?

Tianhai Zhanyi grit his teeth and resentfully said, "Those merchants of the Tang clan are truly treacherous."

In his view, since the Cinnabar Pill was made by Chen Changsheng and the Wenshui Tangs were in charge of distributing the Cinnabar Pill, the Tang clan was naturally aware of the maker's secret identity, or had at least obtained a few pieces of evidence pointing in that direction. Thus, the Tang Seventeenth Master's forbearance and retreat was naturally because he intended to trick them into getting into direct conflict with Chen Changsheng.

Zhu Ye and Ning Shiwei thought the same.

If they had not so quickly seized the opportunity, had not been so thick-skinned, had not retreated with such resolve, the situation by the lake really might have ended up with irreparable

consequences.

This had nothing to do with strength. Of course, Chen Changsheng was extremely talented in cultivation, and the black-clothed girl was probably that rumored being, but even so, they were still not necessarily a match if Zhu Ye's group worked together. Yet how could they dare to offend the Pope in front of so many people?

But were they really just leaving like this?

Zhu Ye suddenly said, "Tonight reminds me of that storm in Xunyang City a few years ago."

This was naturally referring to the old matter in which the entire world had attempted to kill Su Li.

The current situation was naturally different, and the positions that Chen Changsheng and Su Li held were also different, but there were still some similarities.

Whether it was Su Li or Chen Changsheng, as long as they appeared in the world, many people would naturally come to kill them.

Even if they couldn't be killed in broad daylight, they could be killed in secret. They couldn't be killed in front of many people, but they could be stealthily killed in private.

They all understood Zhu Ye's meaning.

Leaving was a must, a stance that they needed to display, but in truth, Chen Changsheng would also find it very difficult to leave this snowy mountain range tonight.

What they needed to do now was to spread the news of Chen Changsheng's location as quickly as possible, and simultaneously prepare for an ambush in this gloomy and cold mountain range.

At this moment, the sound of a zither was heard from the dark mountain path in front of them.

This sound was very flat and light. It was like water condensed into snow, snow frozen into ice, and that ice covering the path: cold and dangerous.

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The Tang clan actually had no idea that the master of the Cinnabar Pill was Chen Changsheng. At the very least, before tonight, they had held the same opinion as the Imperial Court, believing that Chen Changsheng was almost certainly hiding someplace in the south. It was only after they had obtained the complete analysis of the Cinnabar Pill and suspected that those red crystal fibers were blood coral that the Tang Seventeenth Master thought of this possibility for the first time.

It was just a guess, a possibility that was impossible to completely dispel, but there was no proof. Consequently, he had not taken it too seriously, at least on the surface.

But in reality, this conjecture had given him an idea.

Once this idea appeared, it was impossible to dispel or suppress. Like a wildfire, the more it burned, the more it flourished, burning until his mind found it hard to rest easy.

Would the Tang clan ultimately fall into the hands of the chief branch or the second branch?

This primarily depended upon the strengths of the two sides and the stance of the Tang Old Master, but it also depended upon the external aid and the close relationships that both branches had.

In the past two years, the second branch had gained the deep trust of the Tang Old Master and was constantly growing in strength. Why? It was because the Tang Second Master had the support of the venerable master of the Dao.

And who was the backer of the chief branch? A few years ago, the First Master had sent his only son, Tang Tang, to the Heavenly Dao Academy, handing him over to Zhuang Zhihuan to raise. From this, one could see that he had a good relationship with the Orthodoxy. This was even more true now, as everyone knew of the relationship between Tang Tang and Chen Changsheng. No matter how great the pressure of the Imperial Court, no person would

foolishly give up on a friendship with the Pope.

If the second branch wanted to overcome the chief branch and take control over the entirety of the Tang clan, they first had to resolve this matter. As the most trusted aide of the Tang Second Master, the Tang Seventeenth Master had contemplated this matter countless times, so once he thought of this possibility, he very naturally came up with an idea.

If that person really was Chen Changsheng, then...could there possibly be a way to kill him?

No person would dare to attack the Pope in broad daylight. Tianhai Zhanyi did not dare, Ning Shiwei did not dare, Zhu Ye did not dare, and not even the Tang Second Master would dare.

The Tang Seventeenth Master naturally would not dare either, but one night, when he looked at those eyes of his in the bronze mirror, gradually sinking from his ambition and fear, he finally made a decision.

If that person wasn't Chen Changsheng, then he would strive to win their service. If that person really was Chen Changsheng, then he would see...see Chen Changsheng die.

He spoke of this idea to no one, and did not even write to his second brother for instructions. This way, in the aftermath, he could pretend he knew nothing at all.

He truly had not done much. All he did was fail to conceal the news on the location of the Cinnabar Pill's master too perfectly, allowing this news to spread.

As a result, many people came tonight.

Although Zhu Ye's group had left, the Tang Seventeenth Master knew that Chen Changsheng would now find it very difficult to leave these mountains.

Those people would hide in the darkness and wait for a moment to strike.

Most importantly, there would be more people coming tonight.

This phrasing was not too accurate, because those coming weren't humans.

No person dared to attack Chen Changsheng in broad daylight. However, these were not humans, but demons.

Before the mist over the lake had dispersed, no one knew that Chen Changsheng, the present Pope, would choose to live in such a remote mountain range.

But the master of the Cinnabar Pill lived here.

The Tang Seventeenth Master firmly believed that as long as the

demons were to learn of this news, they would assuredly send true experts to take a look.

The demons would certainly not wish to take the Cinnabar Pill or its recipe for themselves, but to kill.

The Tang Seventeenth Master gazed to the darkness in the north, as if he had seen something. In reality, he had seen nothing at all.

The sky in that place was covered in snow clouds year-round, obscuring the starlight and casting all into gloom. Even the precipitous peaks were hard to make out.

Mount Han was the northernmost peak, a natural barrier between the human world and the demon domain.

This place was incredibly cold, the frosty winds chilling to the bone. Even amongst the demons, with their naturally hardy constitutions, only a few experts would be able to make the hard journey across it.

At this moment, on the other side of the mountains, several giant silhouettes seemed to be moving slowly, but were actually cutting through the darkness with extreme speed as they made their way south.

Chapter 760 – A Massive Black Mountain

Several mountainous black silhouettes reached the highest point of the snowy peak.

Once they crossed this place, they would be in the human world, although both maps and military intelligence indicated that this place should be deserted.

The demon expert leading the group had only one hand, and raised it at this time to indicate that the group should halt.

The cold wind howled, rustling the demon's iron clothes, throwing his black hair into disarray, and revealing his demon horns, which seemed both real and unreal.

His eyes were a dark green and extremely cruel. His tall and sturdy body exuded a powerful Qi. Anyone who saw him would feel a boundless fear.

The second-ranked Demon General, Hai Di.

In Xuelao City or the snowy plains, amongst demons or humans, all were used to addressing him as Lord Hai Di, out of respect or fear.

As the personage in the Demon Army second only to the Demon Commander, he had killed countless human soldiers and cultivators, his vicious reputation spreading far and wide.

Several years ago, he had been one of the participants in the demons' attempt to ambush and kill Su Li on the snowy plains.

At that time, Su Li had cut off Hai Di's arm with a single slash while he had left a deep wound on Su Li's arm.

One could imagine just how monstrously powerful this demon must be, to be able to injure Su Li.

Hai Di looked down upon the courtyard nestled in the snowy mountains, an extremely rare tinge of apprehension appearing on his face.

There were very few matters in the world that could shock him.

That courtyard was very far away from this highest peak, perhaps a thousand-some zhang. In the eyes of the demon experts on the peak, this courtyard was like a miniature landscape in a pot. The starlight fell upon this landscape, upon the young man standing on the bridge over the lake who was as small as a grain of sand. For anyone but Hai Di, it would simply be impossible to clearly make out the appearance of the young man.

He had been able to see, so he was very shocked.

It was at this moment that the young man raised his head to the peak.

Separated by a thousand zhang of mountains, they silently stared at each other for a long time.

"I did not expect for it to be Your Holiness," Hai Di expressionlessly said.

He naturally spoke in Demon language, his voice deep and filled with a strange charm.

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"Leave as quickly as possible. Something will happen here soon, and I might not be able to protect you when that time comes."

After saying, Chen Changsheng felt a ripple from the hidden Divine Staff.

This informed him that the demons had already arrived, and the ones who had come were probably terrifying experts that he could not deal with.

His gaze moved upward, reaching the highest part of the mountains, but he could not see clearly what was up there.

No matter how great his eyesight, it was impossible to see through the infinite darkness there.

But he knew who was there.

An Hua, the general, and all the rest of their group were very shocked, because he had not said that he wouldn't consider protecting them, but that he couldn't protect them...

Just who was this foe soon to arrive that not even the Pope could protect them from?

A fierce gale suddenly stirred over the spring-like stillness of the lake. The frigid wind off the mountains tore away at the atmosphere of the four seasons and rushed to and fro across the lake, its howls grating on the ear.

The howling of the wind also contained a few other noises.

Excepting An Hua, everyone could hear that this was Demon language. The general even heard the words 'Your Holiness' in them.

They all turned grim, realizing that the foes coming were demons, and presumably demon experts!

No one fled. One by one, the soldiers began to pull out their blades and array themselves behind Chen Changsheng.

The general had An Hua watch over the young array master on

the stretcher while he himself entered the pavilion and knocked Doctor Yang unconscious.

With a battle against demon experts about to begin, he would not allow any sort of unsafe factors to appear in his camp.

Zhusha glanced at the general, rather appreciative.

Chen Changsheng stared at the distant peak and sighed, "I also didn't expect that I would meet you again tonight."

A bit more than a year ago, his last appearance for the eyes of the people was in a pitched battle between the humans and demons. At that time, he had brought Zhusha and sneaked into the army headquarters. On one side, he treated the injured as a doctor, while on the other side, he silently killed demons. One day, however, the human army was truly in far too dangerous a situation, forcing him to reveal his true identity. The simultaneous attack of his one thousand swords forcefully reversed the situation, yet...it also attracted that monstrous demon expert.

Hai Di descended from the sky and heavily wounded him in a single blow.

Zhusha took the risk of leaving her spiritual soul wandering and homeless to evade Hai Di's perception and bring Chen Changsheng underground to escape the battlefield. Yet neither of them expected that in the sprawling mountains, they would be ambushed several times by human experts.

Later on, they naturally came to know that these human experts came from the Imperial Court. To be more precise, they came from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets that was subordinate to the Imperial Court.

He truly had been in a perilous situation, and if not for Liu Qing silently appearing like a ghost, he would already be dead.

This was a set of rather bitter memories that had somewhat discouraged Chen Changsheng, so he had chosen this remote residence in the uninhabited mountains to live.

And the source of all this was Hai Di.

Tonight, he encountered Hai Di once more. Did that mean that his bitter encounter would repeat itself?

On the frigid peak, Hai Di looked down on the distant, pearl-like lake, his face emotionless and callous to the extreme.

I have received the Military Advisor's order to come and take your life."

Black Robe wanted to kill the master of the Cinnabar Pill.

If he were to know that the master of the Cinnabar Pill was Chen Changsheng, he would naturally want to kill him even more.

In these deserted peaks with no true expert to protect the young Pope, if he were to miss out on this opportunity, then the Moon God would abandon Xuelao City.

For some inexplicable reason, Hai Di was not worried that Chen Changsheng would escape. He was in no rush to charge down the peak, instead standing on the peak and speaking with him.

What happened next explained it. He didn't need to charge down the mountain, and he was sure that it was too late for Chen Changsheng to leave.

Hai Di leaped from the peak.

A streak of fire flashed in the night sky and was quickly extinguished.

The winds howled and the stars dimmed, and even the darkness seemed to have been torn away.

Not too long ago, Ning Shiwei had sent a boulder flying, shattering the bridge on the lake.

Hai Di, on the other hand, had turned himself into a stone, no, into a great mountain.

Compared to his momentum, Ning Shiwei's boulder was so weak that it was rather laughable.

With the shrill sound of air being compressed, a mountainous shadow covered the lake.

An unimaginably terrifying impact struck the lake.

Rumble!

With a heavy and terrifying clap of thunder, the lake water was instantly converted into steam. Mist rose up to obscure half of the mountain range.

The courtyard was completely destroyed, transformed into rubble. The wooden bridge was like a snake that had ruptured inch by inch, its corpse lying on the mud of the lakebed.

Those troops from the Mount Song Army headquarters were either dead, injured, or unconscious.

A green leaf had unfurled itself in front of An Hua, protecting her and the array master on the stretcher.

That deputy general was still alive. Collapsed amongst the rubble of the pavilion, he coughed blood. Seeing the still-devastating turbulent Qi in the darkness, he showed despair on his face.

The clear clangs of swords finally rang out.

Countless sword intents came from all directions, carrying the might of a storm as they slashed at the mountainous black figure.

Chapter 761 – How Does One Conquer Demons?

Countless sword glows suddenly shone within the dense mist.

Chen Changsheng gazed at the mist around him, his left knee slightly bent, his right hand gripping the hilt at his waist as if ready to unsheathe his dagger at any moment.

In reality, countless swords had emerged from his body, slashing at his surroundings. Incredibly sharp sword intent covered the world, slicing the already-ruined courtyard, the rocks on the lakebed, and the forest immersed in snow into countless pieces, but it was unable to hack through the surrounding mist. For some reason, this mist became abnormally deep and black like the night. It was dense and real like the thickest of mud.

The sharpest and most powerful sword intent falling against this black and thick mist could only whirl, struggle, and vanish like a dry leaf falling into the muddy water.

This black mist was no longer purely made of water. It had already been dyed by the purest demonic intent.

With a zeng, Chen Changsheng pulled out his dagger.

The bright and stainless dagger cared not for that horrifying and dark demonic intent, finally cutting a hole in the mist.

The black mist roiled, especially where the Stainless Sword had cut a hole, where it seemed like countless streams of filthy water were spurting out.

A hand thrust out of the sputtering darkness, gripping a weapon that looked like a rock. Upon careful examination, one could see that it looked very much like a broken monolith.

Compared to this weapon like a broken monolith, the hand holding it was even more frightening.

Even the fracturing space or Chen Changsheng's formidable sword intents were incapable of making this hand give the slightest tremble.

The black mist grew even more restless, sputtering under the pressure, and the mountainous figure of a demon finally appeared before Chen Changsheng's eyes.

The howling winds blew about this powerful demon's beard and hair, yet they were incapable of shaking his horns or his body.

The broken monolith descended from the heavens.

Chen Changsheng felt like he was seeing some massive black mountain collapsing and crashing down on him.

An indescribably violent Qi shot straight towards a spot one inch to the right of the center of his eyebrows, not veering in the

slightest.

A most overbearing power aimed itself at this most subtle of points, a representative of Hai Di's nigh unstoppable strength.

Chen Changsheng had had this sort of almost stifling experience a bit more than a year ago on the snowy battlefield.

Even if he had one thousand sword intents and ten thousand techniques, he could not make up for that uncrossable gap between the two.

There was nothing new about this encounter. All was like last year. His eyes were bright and clear, without the slightest fear. His wrist turned, his dagger rising level with his brow.

He was still preparing to use the third sword that Su Li passed on to him.

The Stupid Sword.

He knew that this technique could block Hai Di, but he also knew that he would suffer severe injuries.

He had already received proof of his result on the battlefield, but this was still the method he chose.

On the surface, this choice truly did seem rather stupid, just like

the name of this technique.

But besides this technique, he had no other method of blocking Hai Di's full-strength blow.

Yes, he could not avoid it, could not retreat. He had to block Hai Di's blow, just like he had on the battlefield.

Back then, several hundred ordinary soldiers had been standing behind him, and now those ordinary people, injured and unable to escape, were behind him.

But tonight, he was not fighting alone.

After he suffered heavy injuries in that battle last year, that girl had never let him leave her sight again.

A dark ray of light suddenly appeared in the black mists, the remnants left behind as she lunged through the air.

Just when Chen Changsheng brought the dagger level with his eyes, the black-clothed girl appeared in front of him and raised her hands to break through the mist and meet that broken monolith.

Compared to Hai Di's mountainous body, she seemed very tiny.

In the face of the black stone like a broken monolith, her pure white hands seemed very pathetic, frail things that would be

rendered into countless splinters in the next moment.

But she still raised her hands to meet it, her posture rather strange. It didn't seem like she was fighting, but offering flowers.

And then a flower pot truly did appear in her hands.

But there were no flowers in this pot, only a green leaf, and there were only two leaves left, making it seem rather desolate.

The broken monolith clashed in the air with the Green Leaf.

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There was no sound. Compared to the howls of air as the surrounding mist was crushed, the silence over the bridge was rather strange.

This was because those two powers were too monstrously strong, shattering everything around, the frequency of their vibrations surpassing the senses of ordinary beings.

The last bits of water in the mud were squeezed out by these two powers and then vaporized.

They were soon quickly frozen by the cold emitted from the girl's face.

The mist gradually thinned. Whether it was the moisture or demonic intent, all was condensed into water, and then before there was time to become rain, it was frozen into beads of ice.

Countless crystalline beads of ice reflected the starlight falling from the night sky, gleaming like so many Night Pearls and illuminating the scene with incomparable beauty.

So beautiful that it did not seem a part of the human world.

Just like that place under New North Bridge, shrouded in endless night.

As she stood before this rain of icy beads, the black-clothed girl's figure was still small.

But now, there was no weakness about her, only absolute power.

A laugh, its meaning difficult to understand, burst from Hai Di's lips.

The mist suddenly thickened once more, a horrifying wave of Demon Qi raging toward her like a deluge.

Deep cracks appeared all over the now-abnormally-dry lake bed.

Her black dress madly danced as countless holes appeared in it. Her black hair also danced, several broken ends dropping down. The chains tied to her ankles also writhed about like snakes in a fire suffering immeasurable pain.

It was evident that in her current state, where she had still not completely broken through the seal, she was still no match for this powerful demon, even with a treasure of the Li Palace supporting her.

But there was no fear on her icy face, no intent to escape.

She raised her head, like a most powerful little girl.

And also a haughty dragon.

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All this happened in a very brief span of time.

Chen Changsheng did not sheathe his sword, but he was also too late to help her.

As boulders tumbled and thunderous booms split the air, several figures like large towers arrived outside the snowy valley.

They were all demon experts that had accompanied Hai Di.

Chen Changsheng suddenly vanished.

Several dozen faint footprints suddenly appeared on the dry and cracked lakebed.

If one were to turn up to the profuse stars in the night sky at this moment, perhaps they would be able to tell that some hidden connection existed between the position of these footprints and the stars in the sky.

This was the Yeshi Step that he had comprehended several years ago from the Daoist Canon. Over these past few years of research, especially after digesting the words on the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, it was no longer as it was in the past.

In a few seconds, he had left the broken bridge, heading towards the perimeter of the valley. He carried countless gusts of wind and sheets of rain with him, completely enveloping those demon experts.

The wind and rain were all swords.

There were swords everywhere.

"Gu lun mu!"

Hai Di suddenly called, his voice carrying an unconcealable surprise.

Chapter 762 – A Legendary Monolith

'[Gu lun mu](#)' was a phrase in Demon language that meant to be careful

Hai Di naturally knew that Chen Changsheng knew the Yeshe Step, and last year, he had personally felt Chen Changsheng's swordplay and knew that this young Pope had truly far surpassed his cultivating peers on the path of the sword. However, he in no way believed that Chen Changsheng could defeat the capable subordinates he had brought with him.

But when Chen Changsheng vanished and a storm of swords enveloped the valley, he felt a fierce wariness.

It was only now that he realized that the swords Chen Changsheng had used earlier had been for the purpose of concealing his true level.

In the short span of a year, Chen Changsheng's cultivation had not changed, but he had advanced once more on the path of the sword, reaching a high unimaginable level.

From this, he could imagine that the black-clothed girl blocking his broken monolith had been planned in advance.

This sort of plan embodied the pair's formidable confidence and resolve.

They were confident that the black-clothed girl with the Green Leaf would be able to resist the terrifying Hai Di for a period of time.

They were confident that in this period of time, Chen Changsheng would be able to kill off all the remaining enemies!

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The snowy valley was covered in swords, but the true appearance of the swords could not be seen, only their sword intents.

The wind and rain were all swords, the swords concealing themselves within the storm. When they occasionally revealed their true appearances, they had assuredly gotten close to the bodies of those demon experts.

Kakakaka. The sound of metal grinding against metal and being cut rang out without any sort of cadence or tempo.

All along the massive bodies of those demon experts, countless sword wounds made by incomparably sharp swords continuously appeared without any rhyme or reason.

Those sword wounds were the marks left behind as the swords, flashing like lightning, hacked at the bodies of the demon experts. It was a dazzling and hair-raising sight.

The bodies of demons were innately tenacious. Even the most ordinary of demons would possess a body tougher than a human who had gone through a perfect Purification. The experts that had accompanied Hai Di tonight on his assassination mission were select experts of the Demon Army, so the toughness of their bodies was even more difficult to imagine, especially assisted by the faint, black Demon Qi surrounding them. So even though all the swords in this storm were renowned swords, they were not able to instantly break through.

But the demon experts were also incapable of any sort of counterattack, because they were currently unable to pin down Chen Changsheng's position.

The swords were concealed in the storm, and Chen Changsheng was behind it. In order to find him, they first had to disperse these swords.

This situation did not persist for too long, because the storm swiftly increased in intensity, and the number of swords flying about the snowy valley instantly multiplied.

Water boring through stone required an absurdly long period of time, but what Chen Changsheng aimed to do was condense those countless years into an extremely short period of time.

With a crack, that stone under the roof, covered in moss and having a small hole, finally burst open with a seam and then helplessly parted, finally split open.

With a crack, a seam appeared on a demon expert's body, followed by countless more seams.

The sword glows in the storm suddenly brightened, illuminating the gloomy valley. Several hundred streams of green blood spurted out of these demon experts' bodies. It looked just like a painter of Xuelao City madly sprinkling paint over a dark canvas, imbuing it with an endlessly strange and monstrous feeling.

Roars of pain echoed through the valley.

The towering figures of two demon experts keeled over like collapsing mountains.

If this situation persisted, if Chen Changsheng were given another period of time, he would be able to heavily injure all the demon experts in the snowy valley. He could then return to the little Black Dragon and join hands, attacking Hai Di from the front and behind. Even if they were still no match for Hai Di, they would probably be able to find a chance to escape.

As an important personage of the Demon Army second only to the Demon Commander, Hai Di had crisscrossed the snowy plains of the demon domain for many years. Just how could he not see through their plan?

A murderous whistle burst from Hai Di's lips. At the same time, a white ray of light shot out from his lips and melted into the demonic intent.

This milky white ray of light was abnormally clean, free of the slightest impurity, even seeming somewhat sacred.

A few years ago in Xunyang City, Chen Changsheng had seen this sort of light. Although he didn't have time to turn around at this moment, he already knew what it was: moonlight. The bright moon in the northernmost reaches of the continent possessed a radiance no lesser than that of the stars, its energy even wilder and fiercer!

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Popopop. Countless clear popping sounds arose from the ruins of the courtyard.

It was like tens of thousands of candles exploding or countless firecrackers welcoming the new year.

Countless crystalline beads of ice simultaneously exploded and slowly drifted down from the night, sprinkling over the Black Dragon's body and the remains of the bridge.

The broken monolith in Hai Di's hand smashed through the mist of ice and continued to press down upon the Black Dragon.

An edge of a green leaf slightly curled, revealing a tear. This tear was as fine as a thread, but also a ghastly sight.

An annoyed and furious expression appeared in the little Black Dragon's eyes.

Her clothes was already torn all over, and even the corners of her eyes were beginning to tear.

Dragon blood, imbued with an indescribable Qi, seeped out of the corners of her eyes and immediately froze into two streams of blood-colored frost.

If Chen Changsheng did not quickly return, she might become yet another dragon to die under this broken monolith.

The torrential rain pouring over the snowy valley instantly stopped, but the wind did not. Chen Changsheng's body transformed into a stream of light as he rushed back.

Those several demon experts heard Lord Hai Di's whistle and knew what Chen Changsheng intended to do, but how could they let him do as he pleased?

The violent winds suddenly shattered into countless strands of cool breeze and several grunts that obscured several low droning sounds.

The right hands of a few demon experts became flowers of blood

in the darkness.

Without hesitation, they had chosen to use a secret demon blood technique!

Chen Changsheng similarly did not hesitate. He made no attempts to stop or avoid, borrowing the strength of the wind and punches to quicken his pace.

Several dull thuds could be heard in the darkness, and then they dissipated with no echo.

Chen Changsheng had already returned to the broken bridge and now stood before the Black Dragon.

Several holes had been torn through his front lapel, revealing the skin beneath, with the deep impressions of several fists atop it.

The broken monolith was descending.

A bright light shone over the shattered bridge.

It was like lightning.

Yet it was also heavy.

It was like an iron chain placed across a river.

It was also extremely tough.

It was more like two unmovable dikes lining a river.

Only stupid people like Chen Changsheng or Wang Po could learn this sort of Stupid Sword.

Only by being so stupid could one defend so foolishly, making this technique the greatest defensive technique in the world.

Even someone as monstrous as Hai Di, even with his mightiest blow, even with this legendary monolith that no one knew of, could not break through this technique.

Chen Changsheng's sword blocked this broken monolith.

But his sword could not block its strength.

This majestic and primordial strength struck his body.

His right hand holding the sword heavily struck his own chest, and the horrifying sounds of bones breaking could be heard.

He flew backwards, hitting the Black Dragon, causing blood to spill out of her lips.

Like a stone, they flew through the air, penetrating through the ice and darkness, annihilating the pavilion, and crashing on the other side of the lake.⁴

The source of the phrase 'Gu lun mu' is a call-signal used in the Chinese revolutionary opera 'Raid on the White Tiger Regiment', the response to which is 'Ou ba'

Chapter 763 – The Mysterious Strum of the Zither

The deputy general from the Mount Song Army headquarters dragged up his heavily injured body and staggered in front of Chen Changsheng and Zhizhi, blocking the following ripples of Qi, after which he slammed against one of the walls of the courtyard and collapsed into the rubble. An Hua could no longer pay attention to the young array master on the stretcher. She crawled up to Chen Changsheng and Zhizhi, grabbed them by their collars, and used all her strength to drag them backwards, wanting to make as much distance between them and that monstrous figure as possible.

Countless beads of ice ruptured into threads that drifted about the ruins of the courtyard like willow catkins, as if this really was the south, if not for the endless cold and Lord Hai Di's terrifying figure walking from the bridge. The threads of ice drifted away from him, not daring to touch him.

As he looked at Chen Changsheng collapsed on the lake shore, Hai Di remained expressionless, but a ghostly fire blazed in his green eyes. He was a powerful personage of the demons and had experienced countless matters in his life. However, when thinking about how a Pope of the Human race was about to die at his hands, even he felt somewhat nervous and incredibly excited.

The thin mist enveloping the lake and courtyard had been completely replaced by Demon Qi. As if sensing his agitated emotions, the Demon Qi also began to shudder, transforming into a cold wind.

Upon careful observation, one might be able to see that the vast majority of this frigid wind was coming from the weapon, the broken monolith, in his hands.

An Hua's pale face was covered in despair. She lowered her head to avoid looking at this invincible and horrifying foe, and continued to drag Chen Changsheng and Zhizhi behind the courtyard wall.

Suddenly, she realized that Chen Changsheng's body had become much heavier, and she found it impossible to drag him any further. Immediately afterwards, a hand, a very clean, warm, and firm hand, patted her on the shoulder. At the same time, a very clean, warm, and firm voice spoke.

"I can still do it."

The speaker was Chen Changsheng.

He rose up and looked toward the bridge, his hand already gripping his sheath.

The sword was called Stainless, the sheath called the Vault Sheath, and within this sheath were countless renowned swords, as well as his truly most powerful technique.

The moment he gripped the sheath, a string of stone pearls appeared on his wrist.

These stone pearls were simple and unadorned, perhaps even somewhat crude, and they gave off no ripples of Qi.

But when Zhizhi's eyes fell upon them, she felt her heart begin beating faster.

She was one of the highest-class beings of this world, but she still could not see through the truth of these stone pearls. However, from such a close distance, she still felt an innate sensitivity to these stone pearls.

Just what sort of objects were these stone pearls that they could astonish her so?

An Hua's cultivation was not sufficient to sense the special qualities of these stone pearls, but she had devoted her heart to the Dao and her Dao heart was dazzling bright, allowing her to sense another sort of Qi.

This Qi also came from the stone pearls, but not from the stone pearls themselves. Instead, it seemed to come from some extremely faraway world hidden behind one of these stone pearls.

Countless strands of primitive, savage, barbaric, and blood-soaked Qi seemed to be currently rushing over from that world.

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Of the string of stone pearls on Chen Changsheng's wrist, one had been given to Luoluo, half had been given to Xu Yourong, and the remaining pearls were now tied together with a red string. However, they did not seem particularly sparse, as these stone pearls were the Heavenly Tome Monoliths he had taken from the Garden of Zhou and possessed indescribably profound properties.

The savage and blood-soaked Qis that An Hua had sensed were also coming from the Garden of Zhou.

Although he had still not been able to completely comprehend the secrets of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths and his companions in the Garden of Zhou might not be able to transform the heavens and earth, this was still his most powerful technique. Of course, besides this, he also had the letter that he still had not opened.

With these techniques, he was confident that even if he could not defeat Hai Di, he could at least endure for some time.

But if he were to use these techniques and still be unable to change the situation, what then?

Before tonight, he had never considered this problem. He had experience fighting with Hai Di, so he had made preparations. He had originally thought by relying on these techniques, he would be able to beat Hai Di, but he was surprised to find that Hai Di was even more powerful and frightening than last year.

His gaze fell on the broken monolith in Hai Di's hands.

This object was the source of the change, or else Zhizhi would have been able to last for a little longer, enough for him to kill off all the demon experts in the snowy valley.

This broken monolith was probably not a weapon that Hai Di frequently used. At the very least, he had not seen it last year on the snowy plains.

"No matter how many tricks you have, you will definitely die at my hands tonight."

Hai Di stood on the bridge and indifferently said, "With this divine object in my hands, who can resist?"

Was he speaking of this broken monolith?

Earlier, this broken monolith had struck a crack in the Green Leaf in Zhizhi's hands. Although it was a very thin crack, it still gave her and Chen Changsheng an unprecedented shock.

After all, this was the Green Leaf World.

A real and true weapon that could resist, and even slightly harm this world? What could it be other than a divine object?

Chen Changsheng naturally recalled a sight from that night in the Mausoleum of Books.

His martial uncle the Pope's green leaf floated through the darkness and arrived before the Tianhai Divine Empress.

The Tianhai Divine Empress stretched out her hand, took an object from the Mausoleum of Books, and savagely and absurdly struck out with it.

Although the power levels involved in that battle and in this battle tonight were vastly different, the battles were truly rather similar.

The more he associated these two battles, the more Chen Changsheng found the broken monolith in Hai Di's hand to be familiar, even feeling an intimate connection to it.

Could this really be the Heavenly Tome Monolith that had been lost?

This seemed to be the only conclusion, but Chen Changsheng still could not understand it.

If Hai Di really was holding that vanished Heavenly Tome Monolith, then with his monstrous cultivation, as long as he struck with full force, Chen Changsheng and Zhizhi would be powerless to resist. There wouldn't even have been a chance for him to grip this sheath and prepare to use all of his final techniques.

Why had Hai Di not done this? And why was he still standing and speaking on the bridge? Was he afraid of the Li Palace's treasure, or was he waiting for some sort of change?

Something really did change.

The threads of ice drifting about the ruins of the courtyard suddenly vanished.

This was because the extremely clear strum of a zither had occupied every part of the world.

To the Demon race, an opportunity to kill the Pope of the Human race was not an opportunity that could be missed. Even if they had to pay countless lives, they would still do it.

At this moment, Hai Di was only ten-some zhang away from this historic incident certain to shock the world. He could accomplish it in the space of a single breath.

Logically speaking, even if the White Emperor or Shang Xingzhou were personally present, they would be unable to stop him, even though Hai Di would die in the aftermath.

Yet with this clear strum of the zither, Hai Di stopped.

The sound of this zither was extremely clean and cold, carrying a chill that bored into the bones, perhaps representing the mood of the zither player.

As the sound of the zither descended, the bridge was covered in a thin layer of frost. Crossing its slippery surface would presumably be rather difficult.

Hai Di's body was also covered in a layer of frost, as if he had been transformed into an ice sculpture.

He slowly turned around, seeming to move with abnormal difficulty.

He looked towards where the strum of the zither had originated, his green eyes surging with all sorts of emotions.

They were confusion, shock, and fear.

Chapter 764 – The Silent Valley

The frost covering the bridge and a portion of the beads of ice had arisen from the cold of Zhizhi's breath, but another portion came from the distant sound of the zither. This was also an extreme cold, even colder than Zhizhi's breath. There was actually an existence even colder than the dragon breath of the Black Frost Dragons?

A human like Chen Changsheng would find it very difficult to think of an answer, but to Hai Di, this answer was obvious.

Xuelao City was extremely cold, especially the Demon Palace, which was always cloaked in shadows and over which icy winds howled year-round.

He was so shocked, confused, and fearful because he had recalled that place.

Before coming, he already knew that the situation would continue to change tonight, but when the change really was on the verge of arrival, he still found it somewhat impossible to accept. He had never expected that it was that person who was coming.

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"It looks to me that the demons truly don't like the Cinnabar Pill.

They actually sent someone as important as Hai Di."

The Tang Seventeenth Master looked down at the ruins of the courtyard in the valley below with an unfathomable smile on his lips.

The Wenshui Tang clan had paid an enormous price to find a few clues and confirm that the Cinnabar Pill originated from Gaoyang Village, after which they found this valley nestled in the snowy peaks.

He did not deliberately leak this incredibly important intelligence, only closed his eyes for a moment, allowing this news to spread to many places.

Important personages from the Imperial Court had come, as had important figures from the Demon race.

The news had spread out from the Mount Song Army headquarters, so the demons had probably learned the news very late, but they had only been delayed for half a night, and they had sent a truly important figure.

From this, one could see just how much importance Xuelao City placed on this mission.

To the demons, the Human race's possessing such a wondrous medicine was utterly unacceptable.

In battles over the past year, the difference in the number of dead and injured experts on both sides was clearly beginning to favor the humans. A ratio that was one-to-four in the past one thousand years had dropped to one-to-three-point-seven. The change in these numbers did not seem large, but if this trend were to continue? If the number of Cinnabar Pills were to increase? It must be known that this war between the humans and demons had already persisted for one thousand years. Even the smallest change was highly likely to ultimately affect the overall situation.

Thus, the demons had to think of a way to kill the master of the Cinnabar Pill and destroy the recipe.

If this really did occur, the Tang Seventeenth Master would feel somewhat regretful, but he would also be very satisfied, just like now.

As he talked, the sword in his hand remained in the chest of that inn manager from the Mount Song Army headquarters.

The manager painfully gasped, but in the end, he closed his eyes and ceased to breathe.

At this moment, the Tang Seventeenth Master was standing on a steep cliff high up in the snowy mountains. All around him were corpses.

There was still one person left alive.

The once-bishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons had his head lowered, his face pale and teeth chattering, not even daring to glance at the Tang Seventeenth Master.

These dead people were all trusted subordinates of the Tang Seventeenth Master, all from Wenshui, and all personally killed by the Seventeenth Master just a few moments ago in a very brief span of time.

He was naturally doing away with witnesses.

The Tang Seventeen Master seemed to want to borrow Chen Changsheng's knife to deal with Zhu Ye's group, thus opening the way for the Tang clan in Tianliang County. In reality...he wanted to kill Chen Changsheng. Not even the Wenshui Tang clan could bear the burden of killing the Pope, so he could leave behind no evidence. Even his most trusted subordinates had to die. As for Zhu Ye, Ning Shiwei, and the people from the Tianhai clan, even if they developed their own suspicions in the future, they had no evidence to criticize him. And anyway, in order to avoid the fury of the Li Palace, they might even work with him.

"Lord Hai Di probably also didn't expect for the master of the Cinnabar Pill to be the Pope, yes?"

The current situation would remain unaltered. The demons had originally come to kill the master of the Cinnabar Pill, and if they were to discover that Chen Changsheng was still alive, they would be even less willing to let him leave alive.

When he thought about how the current Pope was about to die before his eyes, the Tang Seventeenth Master couldn't help but feel somewhat emotional.

He gazed at the lake and courtyard down below, a grin on his face.

Suddenly, the strum of a zither rose up from some place in the darkness, causing the grin on his face to slowly freeze.

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The first place to hear the strum of this zither was not the lake and courtyard, not the high-up cliff, but somewhere else.

This place was ten-some li from the courtyard, and it was located on that abandoned and lonely road between the courtyard and Gaoyang Village.

Zhu Ye, Ning Shiwei, Tianhai Zhanyi, and several hundred experts and soldiers had paused here after retreating from the courtyard, but it was not yet known what they intended to do next.

They had heard that chilling strum from the zither, but they did not care, as all their focus was on the sounds coming from ten-some li away.

Those thunderous booms, the quaking of the earth, the howling of the storms, and the clanging of swords signified the ferocity of the battle currently taking place.

Those experts were all from north of the mountains.

North of the mountains was the domain of the demons.

Those who had come were naturally demon experts.

If they were not mistaken, those demon experts were currently assailing Chen Changsheng and the black-clothed girl from all sides.

Logically speaking, Zhu Ye or Ning Shiwei should have returned as quickly as possible to offer their aid.

On one side was the Pope of the Human race and on the other were experts of the Demon race. Even a three-year-old child would be able to understand this reasoning. It was a matter that didn't require thought.

But Zhu Ye was quietly gazing at some place in the darkness, Ning Shiwei was indifferently looking up at the snowy peaks, and Tianhai Zhanyi was creasing his brow as if pondering something very complicated.

The mountain path was very quiet. For a very long time, nobody spoke. It was a very bizarre atmosphere.

Suddenly, Zhu Ye's and Ning Shiwei's complexions grew even graver.

The sound from the distant courtyard had not stopped.

It was only at this point that they realized that Chen Changsheng had reached such a formidable level on the path of the sword, and as for the black-clothed girl...a legend was truly a legend.

Zhu Ye and Ning Shiwei glanced at each other and saw the fear in each other's eyes. It now seemed that if they had not conceded and retreated from the lake shore, and instead insisted on trying to force the issue with their strength, they would have undoubtedly failed. All they would have gained was the offense of attempting to assassinate the Pope...

Tianhai Zhanyi's cultivation level was much lower than these two, so he was unable to sense just how powerful Chen Changsheng and the black-clothed girl were through the distant sounds and fluctuations in Qi.

Thus, even though he knew what the strange silence hanging over the mountain path meant, he still found it somewhat boring.

He thought of the strum of the zither that had vanished as suddenly as it appeared and gazed at the darkness hanging over the

mountain path.

The darkness was instantly broken by the sound of a zither, followed by the sound of footsteps.

A straw sandal crushed through the frost covering the mountain path as a person slowly made their way over. The crumbling of ice sounded like the crinkling of fallen leaves in the autumn, the crunching sound they made very pleasant to hear.

The feet within the straw sandals were very delicate, because their owner was a little girl of about twelve or thirteen.

The girl's face was picturesque, but there was a slight wideness between her eyes, and her pupils were slightly leaning towards the center of her brow, making her expression somewhat dull.

A middle-aged scholar followed behind, his body bereft of any items except a zither that he held to his chest.

Without any movement on his part, the zither strings met and parted, releasing extremely chilling sounds.

Chapter 765 – A Most Painstaking Method of Escape

With the second strum of the zither, Zhu Ye and Ning Shiwei grew vigilant. They turned to the girl and middle-aged scholar walking out of the darkness, their faces solemn and wary. For people to appear in such a remote mountain range in such a cold night naturally meant they were not ordinary people.

A subordinate reported that this middle-aged scholar and little girl had been working as musicians in an inn in Gaoyang Village, and many people had met them before. But Zhu Ye and Ning Shiwei knew that this middle-aged scholar was no ordinary zither-player, and this little girl was no ordinary singer. Just like the strum of the zither that had wound its way through the mountain range, they were extremely unusual.

Tianhai Zhanyi also knew that something was strange, but after all the things that had happened tonight, he was already fed up, even numb, and wasn't willing to think about it too much. Moreover, in his view, with the powerful strength on their side, even if the circumstances had forced them into a temporary retreat, could they possibly be unable to deal with these two?

Regardless of what sort of plan you two have, this young master won't even give you the chance to reveal it. I'll just kill you with overwhelming power. Could you possibly be like Chen Changsheng, forcing us to dejectedly bow the moment your face is revealed, and leaving retreat as the only option? Does the human world have a second Pope?

As Tianhai Zhanyi thought this, he casually waved his hand, and several Tianhai clan experts charged towards the girl and scholar.

The sound of the zither was still echoing in the darkness. Suddenly, two streams of light leapt out from the darkness and flew amongst the experts. In an instant, countless flowers of blood bloomed in the air.

Severed limbs and chunks of flesh rained down from the sky and splattered over the icy mountain path, causing flowers of blood to bloom once more.

Two beauties appeared amidst this field of bloody flowers.

One was completely nude, her entire body exuding a mature and alluring aura. The other was attired in the dress of some ancient sword sect, her manner gentle and aloof. They gave off completely opposite feelings, like black and white, but both their hands were dripping red blood onto the ground.

The blood belonged to the experts of the Tianhai clan.

The two beauties had also been somewhat injured, but they were not bleeding blood. From the wounds seeped a clear light that was gradually congealing.

In the chilly wind, the ice was trod on like fallen autumn leaves. The beauties reverentially parted and the dull-faced girl walked out from between them.

Zhu Ye's pupils constricted, his face turning abnormally grave. He said to the girl, "Could it possibly be Princess Nanke?"

He had lived in Tianliang County for many years and knew many secrets about the Demon race. He very easily recognized that these two beauties possessed spiritual bodies and were probably Nanke's rumored wings.

Thus, this singing girl from inn in Gaoyang Village was naturally the youngest Demon Princess, Nanke.

According to the rumors, during the rebellion in Xuelao City, when the Demon Lord was cast into the abyss via the combined might of Black Robe and the Demon Commander, Nanke had also been heavily injured. Taking a massive risk, she used the true body of the Peacock to ram through layer after layer of barriers, and then vanished. No one knew where she was, or even if she was still alive.

Who could have expected that she would appear tonight in these desolate mountains?

Zhu Ye knew that he had encountered a real trouble today. He would rather turn around and go back to the courtyard to engage in battle with Hai Di than meet Nanke.

Nanke was too talented, and within her body flowed the true blood of the Peacock. On the battlefield, she was frequently able to display a killing power far above her true level.

Of course, she could never be as monstrous as Hai Di, but the problem was that she was simply too fast.

If he clashed against Hai Di, even if he was no match, Zhu Ye could at least think of a method to leave or escape.

But before Nanke, he could not think about these things, only about how to defeat her.

If it was just Nanke alone tonight, even with her two wings, Zhu Ye was confident that his side had enough strength to defeat her, but...

"You are the rumored elder of the Candle Shadow Shamans?"

Zhu Ye turned to the middle-aged scholar and asked, "Wasn't it said that you died in the Garden of Zhou?"

The middle-aged scholar lowered his head and gazed at the zither strings as they were blown about by the wind. He seemed somewhat infatuated, paying no regard to these questions.

When Zhu Ye revealed the girl's true identity, the atmosphere over the mountain path became incomparably tense and oppressive, Tianhai Zhanyi's complexion turning rather wan.

Logically speaking, Zhu Ye should have placed all his focus on

Nanke, but right now, he was blabbering nonsense to the middle-aged scholar.

Just how could a person like him be speaking nonsense?

Ning Shiwei understood what Zhu Ye meant and made a few gestures behind his back.

Without any sort of omen or order, the crossbowmen of the Mount Song Army, protected by the experts of the Emotion-Severing Sect and the Tianhai clan, armed their crossbows as quickly as possible and fired at the demon experts on the mountain path.

A torrential rain instantly drowned out the sound of the zither.

Countless divine crossbow bolts, tipped with Sacred Light, engulfed Nanke, the middle-aged scholar, and the two beauties.

But in reality, before this rain of crossbow bolts landed, those two beauties had already vanished.

They transformed into two silhouettes of light, then crumbled into shards that drifted behind Nanke and reformed.

A pair of wings emerged from Nanke's back.

The green wings lightly fluttered, shattering and transforming

into countless streams of green light flying through the night sky.

Like a lightning bolt, Nanke pierced through the rain of arrows.

Other than Xu Yourong, no one else in the world was faster than her, not even these crossbow bolts. In her eyes, they descended as slowly as falling leaves.

No one could clearly make out Nanke's body, only see those green streams of light. They could only watch as these green streams of light arrived amongst the soldiers.

Divine crossbows were broken, red lines appeared on necks, blood splattered into the night sky, torn-off ears flew into the air, and groan after groan could be heard.

Amongst these sounds, several dozen fingers collapsed to the ground.

The green lights gradually faded and Nanke appeared.

She stood surrounded by corpses, her green wings slowly flapping, blood trickling down from the Southern Cross Sword.

Both sword and wings made her seem smaller and more terrifying by contrast.

She gazed at Zhu Ye and the others with indifference.

"Your Highness is truly a genius in the Demon arts. Besides Xu Yourong, there truly is no one faster than you."

Zhu Ye narrowed his eyes. "But you are still too young. No matter how fast you are, you are still no match for us."

Nanke fell quiet for a few moments upon hearing Xu Yourong's name, and then she began to walk towards them.

Everyone felt fear as this petite figure and her wings made their way up the mountain path, even though Zhu Ye had just spoken with great confidence.

"Fight with all your might, and let's see who will come out alive at the end of tonight," Zhu Ye ruefully said.

Ning Shiwei indicated that Tianhai Zhanyi should stand behind him.

At this sight, Zhu Ye confirmed that Ning Shiwei had understood his meaning and felt a bit more at ease.

Tianhai Zhanyi was somewhat surprised but also very grateful.

Nanke walked until she was ten-some zhang from them.

In fact, Zhu Ye was correct. If Nanke truly possessed her rumored

level of strength, then regardless of whether or not she had recovered from the injuries incurred in Xuelao City's rebellion, regardless of how fast she was, she could not defeat two human experts at the upper level of Star Condensation, and this wasn't even considering all the other people present.

But for some reason, Nanke's expression was still wooden and dull, not changing in the slightest.

What happened next could be considered an explanation.

Ning Shiwei suddenly grabbed Tianhai Zhanyi's collar.

Tianhai Zhanyi instantly paled from shock and was just intending to counterattack when he realized that Zhu Ye's finger was pressed down on his Ethereal Palace.

His body was absolutely rigid, leaving him a rock utterly incapable of counterattack.

Ning Shiwei lifted him up and then tossed him at Nanke.

Chapter 766 – Heavy and Despairing Breathing

Tianhai Zhanyi realized that he was flying.

He then realized that he had regained control over his body and instinctively began to wave his arms, his somewhat ridiculous figure akin to that of a dancing puppet. However, his movements were still incapable of shifting his trajectory. As he saw Nanke's small face get closer and clearer, he showed an expression of despair and closed his eyes.

He fell into Nanke's hand, but he did not die.

Nanke had grabbed his front lapel and held him up in the air.

Tianhai Zhanyi opened his eyes, his body shaking uncontrollably, a plaintive whine issuing from his lips.

Nanke tilted her head as she took measure of him, her somewhat dull eyes appearing rather doubtful, somewhat confused as to what was going on.

Tianhai Zhanyi was even more perplexed as to what was going on, overwhelmed by fear and confusion.

Nanke looked past him.

The troops of the Mount Song Army and the experts of the Emotion-Severing Sect and the Tianhai clan were also very confused as to what had just happened.

Zhu Ye and Ning Shiwei had already vanished from the mountain path.

Two howls of wind could be heard in the darkness of the mountain range, along with the occasional sound of a pine tree being crashed through.

One figure was swiftly charging down into a valley while the other was madly rushing up the snowy peaks.

In just a few moments, the two figures were already several hundred zhang away.

Zhu Ye and Ning Shiwei had left.

They had left with the greatest resolve, utterly uncaring about the lives of the subordinates and trusted aides that still remained.

It was evident that this had been their plan the entire time, that they had long since reached a tacit understanding.

The initial questions Zhu Ye had asked the middle-aged scholar and the conversation with Nanke had both been smokescreens.

They had thrown Tianhai Zhanyi at Nanke to buy themselves a little more time.

They had fled in two different directions to buy themselves a little more chance.

All had been for the sake of escaping.

Zhu Ye had never once thought about staying and fighting Nanke. He was not afraid of Nanke's strength, but he had seen through the other person.

It was that middle-aged scholar.

It was rumored that the Candle Shadow Shaman elder who was constantly at Nanke's side truly was very skilled at using the zither to control her foes, but Zhu Ye was incredibly sure that that person had died long ago in the Garden of Zhou.

Just who was that zither-playing middle-aged scholar?

Zhu Ye thought of a possibility, but this sort of conjecture was too frightening, so not even he dared to believe it.

When the rain of crossbow bolts was falling over the mountain path, he wasn't even paying attention to Nanke's response, but instead staring at the middle-aged scholar. The middle-aged scholar had kept his head lowered to the ancient zither at his chest. He remained unmoving, so the zither strings also did not move,

and no attempts were made to dodge, yet those crossbow bolts infused with Sacred Light seemed to naturally drift away out of fear.

This incident made Zhu Ye even more confident that his conjecture was true.

Even if it was only a one-in-one-thousand chance, if the middle-aged scholar was really that person he had thought of, if he did not leave, his death tonight was certain.

So he had decided to escape without the slightest hesitation, even if he looked rather shameless and pathetic.

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Zhu Ye and Ning Shiwei vanished into the dark mountains like two stray dogs.

The soldiers of the Mount Song Army and the experts of the Emotion-Severing Sect were at a loss, not understanding what was going on, much less what they should do next.

The people of the Tianhai clan, seeing that their young master was in the clutches of the Demon Princess, were nervous to the extreme.

Tianhai Zhanyi looked into Nanke's eyes, incredibly afraid, but the shadow of death caused an unimaginable courage to emerge. With a shout tinged with sobs, he struck with his hands at Nanke's forehead.

He seemed very panicked, his fists seemingly devoid of technique, but nobody knew that his two fists carried the supreme technique of the Tianhai clan: Bird Tail Grasping!

Two streams of light tore through the darkness. Tianhai Zhanyi's fists struck Nanke like a lightning bolt, accurately striking their target.

Two extremely clear thumps resounded over the mountain path.

Nanke did not avoid his fists. She did not even attempt to move, but continued to expressionlessly gaze at him.

A gust of wind lightly brushed a thread of her hair, which remained unbroken. Naturally, she had remained unharmed as well.

No one would yield the path to a grasshopper waving its forelimbs, just like how little she cared for Tianhai Zhanyi's attack.

Although the supreme technique of the Tianhai clan was very strong, his fists had no strength.

The nigh impassable gap between cultivation levels would cause all techniques to lose any meaning.

Tianhai Zhanyi was in despair and wanted to say a few words to plead for his life, but he found himself unable to speak.

Nanke released her hand and dropped him, and then walked to the side of the mountain path to gaze at the dark mountains, but she did not summon her two wings.

She looked at the two swiftly retreating figures, one high in the mountains and one down below, and silently thought, these two are probably important personages of the Human race, and even they can actually be so shameless. No wonder that despite how the Divine race has reigned over the north of the continent for more than a thousand years, we still haven't been able to defeat the Human race. Now that I think about it, if I encounter such a situation in the future, I should just kill them at the first moment I get.

Tianhai Zhanyi looked at her back, somewhat at a loss as to what was happening.

Suddenly, he felt a sweetness in his throat and a coldness in his heart.

He lowered his head and saw a feather stuck in his throat, and another feather stuck deeply into his chest.

These feathers were green. In contrast to the inky darkness, they seemed particularly strange and enchanting. They were gripped in the hands of two demon beauties.

With two light whooshes, the green feathers vanished. The two demon beauties transformed into countless specks of light that dispersed and collected on the side of the mountain path, turning back into two lightly flapping wings.

Tianhai Zhanyi dropped to his knees, holding his throat and chest, and watched his blood, green from poison, seep out from his fingers as he gradually ceased to breathe.

Nanke did not even glance at him. She continued to watch those two figures in the mountains.

Zhu Ye and Ning Shiwei had run off in completely opposite directions. Even if she possessed the most inconceivable speed in the world, in these mountains, she could probably only catch one person. Moreover, with her level of strength, she did not dare say that she could gain certain victory against even one of them. After all, these two were true experts of the Human race, and certainly not Tianhai Zhanyi.

She very naturally turned to the middle-aged scholar, asking for instructions as to how she should proceed.

The middle-aged scholar ignored her, his head lowered as he examined the inexplicably vibrating zither strings with great focus.

Nanke understood.

Her wings madly flapped, stirring snow and wind, and she transformed into a green stream of light that vanished in the darkness.

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It was said that descending a mountain was more difficult than climbing one, but when speed was truly necessary, everyone knew that charging down a mountain was much faster than charging up one. However, Zhu Ye had still chosen to escape up into the mountains, not because he was yielding to Ning Shiwei, but because he knew that tonight's escape did not completely rely on speed. A faster speed did not necessarily mean one was safer. On the contrary, it might be more dangerous.

If he were pursuing two escapees, he would definitely chase the one who was fleeing the fastest first.

Just as expected, in the following period of time, he did not hear a howl of wind from behind him, nor did he see a green stream of light.

He was very fortunate, but he did not dare relax. He swiftly circulated his true essence, using the body-lightening techniques of

the Emotion-Severing Sect to their greatest extent. After a while, he had charged across ten-some li and reached the upper edge of the mountains. He just needed to rush across several hundred more zhang, and he would have crossed the valley and be able to see the lights of Gaoyang Village, after which he could alert the garrison there.

His breath had already become very ragged, and he could hear how heavy it was becoming.

The appearance of the dimly lit night sky over the mountain valley endowed his exhausted self with new strength and he quickened his movement techniques once more.

At this moment, he heard an extremely faint sound from behind him.

It was like a thin sheet of ice falling on another piece of ice, like a gust of wind snapping a thread of ice, like a person plucking the string of a zither.

This is an illusion.

This must be an illusion.

Zhu Ye said to himself.

He did not turn around but continued his charge forward, his breathing growing more ragged and heavy, gradually stained by

the aura of despair.

Zhu Ye noticed something, did you?

Chapter 767 – A Single Sigh, One Thousand Li of Mount Han

The strum of the zither that Zhu Ye heard was naturally no illusion.

Although the sound of this zither came from the distant snowy mountains and was somewhat ethereal, it possessed an undeniably objective existence.

It was cold, clear, and fine, like hair or the edge of a blade, and thus sharp.

The cold winds blowing above the snowy mountains were cut apart, the darkness somewhat illuminated by the lights from Gaoyang Village was also cut apart, and the hardest of snow lotuses growing in the ice were cut apart.

Several ruptures appeared on Zhu Ye's shoes, and then deepened until they struck his skin, his flesh, and his bones.

His feet were severed at the ankles. Carried along by their remaining inertia, they flew off into the mountains to parts unknown, leaving behind only two trails of blood in the darkness.

Zhu Ye was unable to cross those mountains and return to the human world. He fell onto the snow, gasping, his body continuously heaving up and down.

He fell very heavily, and having one's feet severed was an incredibly serious injury, but this was not the reason that he remained unmoving on the ground. It was because of despair.

The strum of the zither had crossed through ten-some li, so indiscernible and ethereal, yet it was able to easily sever his two feet.

The middle-aged scholar's identity was already obvious.

He buried his face in the snow and let out a muffled howl of pain. He was like a beast that was heavily injured but had no courage to strike back, only infinite remorse.

The sounds of fighting and screams could faintly be heard from the distant mountains, most likely Nanke casually reaping the lives of those humans on the mountain path.

The sounds of fighting suddenly vanished and the screams gradually faded until only silence remained.

Zhu Ye also fell quiet. With some difficulty, he turned over and gazed at the starry sky, incredibly close to the snowy peaks and thus particularly vivid, and sighed.

If he were not so greedy for the Cinnabar Pill, then given his identity and status, how could he possibly come to such a remote mountain range, and how could he possibly meet such a terrifying foe?

The word 'greed' had already caused the deaths of many, and how many more deaths would it cause in the future?

The ice was tread apart, still crinkling like the dry leaves of autumn being crushed by feet.

With this sound, Zhu Ye's body and mind relaxed, his eyes gradually brightening.

Nanke walked in front of him, her wings slowly moving behind her, bringing a chilly wind with them.

The Southern Cross Sword had already split and was now held in both her hands. Blood dripped from the swords, probably that of Ning Shiwei and those other people.

Zhu Ye calmly gazed at her, his hands gripping the most precious magical artifacts of the Emotion-Severing Sect in his sleeves.

Nanke struck with her sword.

Zhu Ye used his techniques.

Heavy and intense collisions rang out in the snowy peak awash with starlight.

Ten-some bulges appeared on the thick mountain slope as if some

sort of monster wanted to bore its way out of the ground.

The mantle of snow flew up and madly danced in the air, covering the stars and casting the environment into a deep gloom, with the occasional flash of a sword glow illuminating a corner.

The ethereal sound of a zither could faintly be heard.

The world suddenly went still and the wind and snow gradually settled. Snow continued to slide down the mountains, rustling as it tumbled down.

At the highest peak, Nanke's sword was stabbed into Zhu Ye's chest.

Zhu Ye did not lower his head to look at his wound, nor did he look at her. Instead, he gazed towards a distant place.

The sword in his body was truly very cold, but that faint and almost unreal sound of the zither was even colder.

It was so cold that it reminded him of the story his uncle told him many years ago.

In that story, there was a Demon city in the snowy plains of the north, and this Demon city was forever enveloped in darkness.

It was just like the darkness gradually occupying his eyes.

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Carrying Zhu Ye's corpse, Nanke returned to the mountain path.

The mountain path was covered in blood and frozen blood, but the several hundred corpses had been randomly thrown to the sides.

The middle-aged scholar was not plucking the zither, but eating something, and half a corpse was at his feet. From the official shoes and the style of the remaining armor, it was probably Ning Shiwei's.

Nanke offered Zhu Ye's corpse to the middle-aged scholar.

The scholar used both his hands to receive Zhu Ye, and then lowered his head and began to eat.

A sound akin to that of a cat eating leftovers, like gravel being thrust into mud, could be heard.

Blood constantly flowed from between his fingers.

In a short while, Zhu Ye's corpse had vanished. Not a single speck remained.

The wind blew against the scholar's clothes. One could see that his belly was a little swollen.

He closed his eyes, remaining quiet for a long time. He seemed to be appreciating the taste or pondering something.

"No wonder he's Zhu Luo's nephew. Although his cultivation is no good, it still carries a little moonlight. It can be said to be a minor supplement, much better than this general."

The scholar opened his eyes and looked at the rest of Ning Shiwei's corpse at his feet, an expression of disdain on his face.

He took a snow-white handkerchief from his sleeve and slowly wiped the blood from his lips, moving with great grace. He then walked forward into the darkness of the mountain path.

Nanke remained expressionless towards this gory and terrifying sight as she followed.

With the clear strum of a zither, they came to the snowy valley ten-some li away.

Those demon experts that had attempted to encircle Chen Changsheng were covered in sword slashes, their right hands severed, but they were not yet dead.

When they saw the scholar and Nanke, it was like they had seen a real ghost, their faces instantly becoming ghastly pale.

Nanke glanced at them and said, "Go die."

Several streams of green blood exploded as those towering figures crashed into the snow.

Upon hearing Nanke's words, those demon experts had instantly decided to commit suicide!

The courtyard and garden in the valley were already in ruins and the spring lake awash in mist had already become a dry crater. The wooden bridge had been snapped into several dozen pieces and lay like a snake that had been dead for several centuries. All traces of the pavilion had vanished and the beads of ice that filled the sky like catkins were somewhat vexing.

Chen Changsheng and Zhizhi stood on the other side of the lake. An Hua had rescued the general from the ruins, and the two now nervously stood guard in front of the stretcher.

Hai Di stood in the lake, with that weapon that looked like a broken monolith in his hands. It seemed like he was the center of this part of the world.

But in his eyes, whether it was this piece of the world or the vastness of the real world, the true center would forever be that middle-aged scholar who had just appeared.

Nanke ignored him, saying to Chen Changsheng, "I've helped you resolve many troubles. You owe me a favor."

Zhizhi didn't recognize her, but given the tone that she spoke to Chen Changsheng with, Zhizhi felt that they should get acquainted. Looking her over, she suddenly realized something and boundless wariness roiled about her eyes.

"You are that Peacock?"

Nanke's expression was somewhat dull as she asked, "You recognize me?"

"Chen Changsheng mentioned you before."

Zhizhi raised three fingers and placed them between her eyes. "He said that the space between your eyes is too broad, that it was clear that you are ill."

Nanke pondered these words, unsure as to whether she should be angry or not, and her gaze returned to Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng did not look at her. His gaze had always been fixed on the middle-aged scholar.

Before this scholar had even appeared, he had already attracted all of Hai Di's attention, even filled Hai Di with limitless fear.

No more than five people in the entire world could make Hai Di feel such fear.

Coincidentally, he had met this middle-aged scholar once, so he knew who he was.

They had met back then in Mount Han.

Tonight, it was still in Mount Han.

Though the two places were separated by one thousand li.

It was truly a coincidence, truly a misfortune.

He sighed.

Chapter 768 – A Demon Lord Since Time Immemorial

Tonight, this sort of sigh had occurred several times.

When Zhu Ye's group had been standing by the lake shore and realized that the master of the Cinnabar Pill was Chen Changsheng, they had given a similar sigh.

In the snowy mountains, when Zhu Ye's feet were cut off by the sound of the zither and he looked up at the stars to await his death, he had given a deep sigh.

Now, when Chen Changsheng saw the middle-aged scholar, he also could not help but sigh.

The gap between the two sides was too vast. Even if he used all his methods and possessed a boundless intelligence, even if he was willing to sacrifice his life, he would find it impossible to reverse the situation.

Of course, he would be reluctant, but would find himself utterly helpless. All his emotions would ultimately intersect and transform into a single sigh.

What shocked and confused Chen Changsheng the most was that everyone said that the abyss was endless, so why was he still alive and standing right in front of him?

As he thought of these things, he shot a silent glance at Hai Di.

From the moment he heard that chilling strum of the zither and turned to look, Hai Di had ceased to move. His gaze remained fixed on the direction from which the sound of the zither had arisen, precisely where the scholar was standing now.

This powerful demon was currently stiff in both body and mind, but Chen Changsheng was very sure that the demon had noticed his glance.

This glance was a question.

'Do you want to work together?'

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The humans and demons had fought for many years, both sides suffering grievous casualties and developing the deepest of grudges, especially after the accord between Emperor Taizong and the Demon Lord was torn up one thousand years ago. Except in extreme circumstances, like the unforgettable grudge of the Liang clan after their clan was almost completely exterminated, or the old matter regarding Zhou Dufu, the experts of the two sides had never worked together. When Shang Xingzhou was secretly supervising the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, he had only come to a silent agreement with the powerful figures of Xuelao City that

neither side would involve themselves in the other's affairs, but neither side would ever directly borrow the other's strength.

No one could bear such eternal infamy.

But Chen Changsheng would not have to worry about this problem when working together with Hai Di, because the identity of this middle-aged scholar would have the entire continent agree with his plan.

And this alliance was certainly feasible. Hai Di was highly likely to agree to this alliance.

Two years ago, after the rebellion in Xuelao City, the Demon Lord had died and Nanke had disappeared, and countless ministers and members of the Imperial clan loyal to the old government were executed, but Hai Di had survived, and his influence was even greater than before. Now, he was imbued with the weighty authority of the frontlines of the Demon Army. It was an absolute certainty that he had been one of the members of the rebellion.

If he wanted to live past this night, he had to ally himself with Chen Changsheng.

The temptation of killing Chen Changsheng, the Pope of the Human race, was truly enormous, but to Hai Di, killing this scholar was clearly a matter that surpassed everything else in the world.

Hai Di did not return Chen Changsheng's questioning glance. He continued to stare, warily and fearfully, at the scholar, his grip tightening on the broken monolith.

The ruined courtyard was very quiet. Everyone was well aware of what this silence signified.

Nanke's eyes turned colder and colder, the luster of her wings turning darker and darker, and even more enchanting and monstrous.

It was at this point that the middle-aged scholar spoke.

"I'm about to die."

His voice was very ordinary.

An ordinary indifference, an ordinary dignity, an ordinary supremacy—there was nothing special about this voice.

But if one were to carefully examine this man's face, they would notice some very extraordinary aspects.

The scholar's face seemed to be enveloped in an eternal layer of faint darkness.

Countless golden inscriptions seemed to float on the surface on this darkness, and beneath these golden inscriptions were

paintings of landscapes. One moment it was a desert, and then a sea. With the arch of his brow or the curve of his lip, waves would rise from the sea, the sand would flow. The landscapes were incomparably lively, yet also abnormally cold and still, because there was not a single person amongst these myriad landscapes.

And when he said that he was about to die, this grand universe greatly dimmed as if all was on the verge of returning to extinction.

Thus, Chen Changsheng knew that he spoke the truth.

He thought of how, many years ago in that room in the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education covered with all sorts of plum blossoms, he had heard Mei Lisha say similar words.

Two years ago, he had heard his martial uncle the Pope also say these words, though he could not remember if it was in the Li Palace or the Orthodox Academy.

He pondered all this, then said to the scholar, "As long as one lives, one must die."

The scholar answered, "The fourth marvelous phrase from the Essay on the Origin of the Dao."

Chen Changsheng did not ask what the first three phrases were, as every person had their own understandings and enlightenments when studying the Daoist Canon. Of course, he would also not be

shocked that this scholar had so easily recognized that this phrase was from the Essay on the Origin of the Dao. This was because everyone knew that this person was incredibly well-read, an extraordinary scholar second only to Tungus in Xuelao City.

"But who is truly willing to die? Tianhai, Yin, or those old friends from even earlier—no matter how calm they seemed on the surface, just how could they be willing to differentially walk into that darkness? I am also unwilling, so I climbed out of that terrifying darkness and came here to meet you."

As he slowly spoke, the darkness covering the scholar's face grew heavier and heavier, increasingly difficult to look at directly.

From his tone, Zhizhi was able to guess at his identity, but she didn't dare believe it, and her voice shook slightly.

"You...just what does Sir want to do?"

"Your father said to me that you didn't like to study, that your personality is foolish and naive. Tonight, I see that this is truly the case."

The middle-aged scholar had a gentle expression, speaking to her like an elder. "Relax; for the sake of your father, I naturally will not make things difficult for you."

Through these words, Zhizhi confirmed this man's identity and was so shocked that she couldn't speak. She subconsciously turned

to Chen Changsheng, her eyes bewildered and helpless.

Countless years ago, a mighty Black Frost Dragon was not willing to take the position of Patriarch of the Dragon race and traveled to the distant continent.

In the continent, it met many similarly mighty existences and then died in the Garden of Zhou.

That dragon was her father.

Of those mighty existences, only one had been her father's friend. To put it another way, her father only admired that existence.

With the passing of time, the Great Zhou had gone through several emperors, the Mount Li Sword Sect had gone through three Sect Masters, and even the Tang clan had changed its heads twice. Only that person remained forever seated on the highest point of the Divine Palace. It was such that many people fell under the mistaken assumption that since time immemorial, in the heavens above and the earth below, the Demon race only ever had one...Demon Lord.

Yes, the middle-aged scholar was the Demon Lord.

He was the most powerful and most talented monarch in the history of Xuelao City, His Majesty that all of the Demon race prostrated themselves in worship to, the most feared foe of the Human race.

If not for the fact that countless geniuses had suddenly appeared in the Human race during his reign, the Demon race would have already occupied the entire continent under his leadership.

But whether it was Zhou Dufu, Chen Xuanba, Emperor Taizong, and Wang Zhice a thousand years ago or Tianhai, Yin, and Shang a thousand years after, none of them had been able to truly defeat him.

Confronting those human experts surging forward like the countless stars in the night sky, he still led the demons in the northern reaches of the continent, towering and unbowed, just like the eternal darkness over Xuelao City.

In every aspect, he was the mightiest Demon Lord.

Whether it was since time immemorial, or in the heavens above and earth below.

Chapter 769 – I Use My Blood to Save All Living Beings

A thousand years ago, he was the Demon Lord, and after a thousand years, he was still the Demon Lord, but even the Demon Lord was ultimately unable to escape the laws of history, falling in a rebellion.

Naturally, according to the laws of history, the originators of this rebellion were by necessity his most trusted subordinates.

As the left and right arms of the Demon Lord, Military Advisor Black Robe and the Demon Commander had vied for power with each for countless years, exchanging blow for blow. They were as incompatible as fire and water, both deeply loathing the other. It was only the Demon Lord's supreme prestige that barely managed to keep the situation stable, but how could this situation not be what the Demon Lord most desired, even intentionally fueled?

Who could have expected them to join hands and deliver unto the Demon Lord the stealthiest of strikes?

The Demon Lord had already been heavily injured after his excursion to Mount Han, and then he experienced such a fierce rebellion and was cast into the infinite abyss. The imperial throne ultimately came to rest on his youngest son. At the very beginning, both the noble clans of Xuelao City and the Human race to the south believed that the young Demon Lord was merely a puppet placed on the throne by Black Robe and the Demon Commander. Only after Divine General Han Qing was trapped and killed by the most insidious methods of the young Demon Lord did the entire

continent finally understand that he was actually the primary driver behind this rebellion!

Brother against brother and father killing son for the sake of the imperial throne was a commonplace event for both the Demon race and the Human race. In short, the Demon Lord that not even Zhou Dufu, Emperor Taizong, the Tianhai Divine Empress, Yin, or Shang had been able to truly defeat was ultimately still knocked into the stinking ditch of history, defeated at the hands of his own son.

But hadn't he already died in the endless abyss? Why had he now appeared in this snowy mountain range?

As they stared at the middle-aged scholar's figure standing by the lake, An Hua and the general paled, and even breathing became a difficult task for them.

This was the question that perplexed everyone the most, that everyone wanted to know the answer to.

Nanke stood in front of Chen Changsheng, saying nothing.

She was keenly aware of how painful was the price one had to pay to climb out of that endless abyss, but even she had no desire to recollect it.

The Demon Lord would naturally not explain. He said to Chen Changsheng, "I am only about to die, but I am still not dead. I do

not want to die, so I came to find you."

Chen Changsheng asked, "What did you come to find me for?"

The Demon Lord expressionlessly said, "I came to seek your aid."

"You want the Cinnabar Pill?" Zhizhi suddenly asked.

She was feeling things out with this question, her voice tinged with a little hope.

"It's not enough. There is too little blood mixed into the Cinnabar Pill."

The Demon Lord's answer shattered her final hope.

Upon hearing this reply, Hai Di, An Hua and the deputy general could not help but be stunned.

The Cinnabar Pill contained blood? Whose blood? If the Tang Seventeenth Master had heard these words, he would have immediately understood that those crystalline threads of red in the Cinnabar Pill were not blood coral, were not the blood of the little Black Dragon, but Chen Changsheng's blood!

After a moment, An Hua and the deputy general glanced at each other. They both saw the shock in each other's eyes, as both of them had also thought of this possibility.

In the past few years, the story of the Tianhai Divine Empress, the venerable Daoist master Shang Xingzhou, the emperor, and the Pope had been spread across the world.

Through the Orthodoxy's guidance and proclamation, everyone came to know that the Pope had a naturally sacred constitution, that his true blood was brimming with Sacred Light.

It turned out that the Pope was actually making his blood into medicine. It was no wonder that the Cinnabar Pill could regrow bones and treat the dying!

It was no wonder that there was a limit to the number of Cinnabar Pills, that only a small bottle could be produced each month.

It was no wonder that the Pope had not spread the recipe across the world.

It was simply impossible to copy the recipe for this pill. Just who besides the Pope could offer up this medicine?

As she looked forward, An Hua felt that Chen Changsheng's body had become much loftier. Bathed in starlight, it seemed incomparably divine.

To use one's blood to save all living beings, just how benevolent was this act, how grand this sentiment?

An Hua felt thoroughly ashamed when she thought about how she had felt greatly displeased by the master of the Cinnabar Pill in the Mount Song Army headquarters, and how she had even felt somewhat disappointed earlier.

Chen Changsheng said to the Demon Lord, "If I knew that Sir was still alive, I would have been more careful, because the fact that the Cinnabar Pill contains my blood truly cannot be concealed from you."

A few years ago, the Demon Lord had taken an enormous risk to make the long journey to Mount Han precisely so that he could eat Chen Changsheng.

After the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, the Pope had said to him that the only person in the world that dared to crave his true blood was the Demon Lord.

The Demon Lord had an intense craving, and he also had the methods, or courage, to resolve the problem of the toxin that might be concealed in Chen Changsheng's true blood.

Zhizhi looked to Chen Changsheng in concern, and also anger. In her view, if not for the fact that Chen Changsheng had lost too much true blood and greatly affected his cultivation in this past year for the sake of that lousy pill, Hai Di would not have been able to keep them here, and so they would naturally not have to face this terrible situation.

The Demon Lord calmly said, "Since I am still alive and have even found you, perhaps that is just your fate."

Chen Changsheng looked into his eyes and said, "Sir should be well aware that I was born as a poisonous fruit."

The corner of the Demon Lord's lips perked, revealing an enchanting smile. The landscapes on his face instantly brightened as his face became especially gentle and his voice pleasing to the ear. "I am a man. In the end, I still have more courage than little Tianhai, and I also have lived many more years, seen many more worlds, so perhaps I have the means of resolving these problems."

Chen Changsheng vaguely understood his meaning and replied, "But you are not sure."

The Demon Lord answered, "Even if I am not sure, it seems to me that you are."

Chen Changsheng gazed at a thread of ice drifting in front of him, but did not reply.

The Demon Lord looked into his eyes and said, "The Cinnabar Pill did not poison to death those human experts, indicating that you have already found a method to remove the poison in your true blood."

Chen Changsheng silently thought, what sort of poison is there? It's just a conflict between two different divine laws.

Zhizhi couldn't keep quiet. "So you want Chen Changsheng to remove the poison from his body and then serve himself up to you?"

"Why is that not okay? Once I eat you, my old wounds recover and I surpass my past self, I will naturally return to Xuelao City to seize the imperial throne. Although I am sure that I will gain the final victory, those two crazies, Black Robe and Big Sister, are people that not even I can completely see through, and that unfilial son of mine is quite the excellent madman. Thus, I will assuredly need a very long time and descend into a desperate struggle that is highly likely to last several centuries. My Divine race will find it impossible to go south. Is this not the greatest benefit towards your Human race?"

The Demon Lord calmly said to Chen Changsheng, "The Daoist faith has always emphasized governing the world with compassion. With the dignity of the Pope, you do not hesitate to use your own blood as a pill. It naturally must be so that you can save all living beings. Why can you not transform your own body into a pill and offer it to me? In this way, you can also save all living beings, and you can save even more. Your one death can be exchanged for centuries of peace. Is this not something to be happy about?"

It was clearly a most fantastical proposal, but his slow argument made it actually seem rather reasonable.

Zhizhi could no longer bear to listen, and shouted, "Then why don't you just go die!"

Chapter 770 – Sharp Words, How About Dragon Cries?

The Demon Lord would naturally not kill himself at the words of another, as he had been born with a cruel disposition and unrelenting will.

Of course, normally speaking, even without such qualities, no one would kill themselves at the words of another. This had nothing to do with selfishness, but with the intrinsic qualities of life itself.

But Zhizhi was somewhat worried about Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng had become well-versed in the Daoist Canon as a child and cultivated the Dao of following his heart. He had always acted differently from the masses, and after the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, there had been yet another change in his conduct.

He currently lived life too indifferently.

To put it another way, before the coup, he had viewed his life with incredible importance. Whether it was in what he ate, his everyday routine, or the way he cultivated, he always considered his life above all. Now, however, he had begun to drink wine, although it was not much. He was also eating a lot of beef and lamb, although he didn't eat them grilled very much. In short, he didn't care as much as he did before.

He seemed to care more about how he could use his life to accomplish a few things.

As a result, he left the capital for the sake of the general situation and became the first exiled Pope in history.

As a result, he appeared last year on the battlefield in the snowy plains, engaged in bloody battle with the wolf cavalry, and then nearly died.

As a result, the Cinnabar Pill appeared in the world.

"After leaving the capital, no, even before that, I was thinking about just what I should do with my life now that I can live for so many years. At the beginning, I wanted to put my efforts into helping the Human race on the battlefield, but later on, I realized that this wasn't right. My cultivation and strength are not sufficient to change the course of the war, and although my medical skills are quite good, they're not that special when compared to the clerics and doctors of the Sacred Hospital. The use of a single person has a limit. Finally, I suddenly came up with the idea of the Cinnabar Pill."

He said to the Demon Lord, "I truly did want to save a few people, but Sir has gotten a few things wrong. I have never thought about saving all living beings. I don't have such great abilities. I can only save a few specific people that I can see. Moreover, there is another very important problem. Although using my true blood to make Cinnabar Pills and save lives is somewhat taxing on my body, it

won't kill me. On the other hand, if I saved all living beings, as you advise, I would have to pay death as the price, so I cannot accept this proposal."

The Demon Lord replied, "Those last words of yours are somewhat reasonable."

Chen Changsheng earnestly continued, "Most importantly of all, Sir said that eating me could be exchanged for the demons' being incapable of moving south for several centuries, but this is meaningless to me."

The Demon Lord asked, "Oh, why is it meaningless?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "Because we simply don't care about whether you go south or not. We have always planned on moving up into the north; we intend to go to Xuelao City."

As he spoke, his eyes were very wide and bright, appearing like a bottomless lake. They seemed so sincere and clean that they made one want to trust in them.

"As expected of the youngest Pope in history. You're much more passionate than those old fellows, and also more amusing. Of course, you're also much more childish."

The Demon Lord smirked, "Do you really think that these words of mine were seeking your opinion?"

"Not seeking my opinion, but persuading me, or weakening my will."

Chen Changsheng continued, "Because Sir is well aware that though Sir can kill me, it won't be like last time where Sir could easily control me. I have the ability to destroy my body before Sir can succeed, burning away all the blood in my body and leaving you with no harvest, bereft of your final hope."

In truth, what he didn't say was that in front of the Demon Lord, he still had a chance to escape.

He did not want the Demon Lord to be on guard, and most importantly, he wanted to try and see if he could take the remaining humans with him in escape.

The Demon Lord gave him a very prolonged and silent stare.

A clattering of metal and a chilling voice rose up at the same time.

"You owe us two lives."

Nanke threw the emblem of the Zhu clan and the command medallion of the Mount Song Army in front of Chen Changsheng.

This argument was even more unreasonable than the Demon Lord's.

Zhizhi pointed at Hai Di and said, "We've killed a few of your traitors, and we've delayed this big fellow until you could come and take care of him. How do we calculate this bill?"

Nanke silently contemplated the matter.

Chen Changsheng was very gratified.

He had never been good at quarreling with words or making unreasonable demands, unless he was in front of Xu Yourong. In this aspect, he was disadvantaged against everyone, even the dull Nanke. Fortunately, experts in this aspect had always been at his side. In the beginning, it was Luoluo, and later on it was Tang Thirty-Six, and now he had Zhizhi.

Nanke seemed to think of some reasoning and said, "Without mentioning the earlier matter, one life in exchange for one life is also very fair."

Zhizhi seemed a little surprised, asking, "Just whose life have you prepared to exchange for Chen Changsheng's life?"

"We won't touch you, so it's naturally his own life," Nanke replied.

Zhizhi asked, "What nonsense is this?"

Nanke calmly reasoned, "We can kill him right now, and the fact that we haven't means that we've spared his life. Then he can use his life in exchange. This is very fair."

"This makes sense to you?" Zhizhi opened her eyes wide, utter disbelief within.

Nanke asked Zhizhi, "Do you not understand?"

Zhizhi seriously replied, "I don't understand bullshit."

Nanke advised, "You must speak reason."

Zhizhi answered, "You have to have a sense of shame."

This world had countless young girls, and Nanke and Zhizhi were undoubtedly the strongest and most dangerous of the two.

But when they argued, they were still young girls, somewhat ridiculous and making others feel helpless.

As they argued, no one noticed that Chen Changsheng had silently taken a few steps back.

At this point, he was only a few steps away from An Hua and the deputy general. With just two more steps, they could touch hands.

But just when he was prepared to act, a cold gust suddenly blew across the lake shore, the air rippled, and countless specks of light blossomed behind him.

The specks of light condensed in the wind, transforming into a naked beauty and a refined maiden dressed in a sword uniform.

They noiselessly appeared behind An Hua and the deputy general, their hands resting on the pair's throats.

Nanke ceased to converse with Zhizhi and expressionlessly declared to Chen Changsheng, "Now it's three lives."

Chen Changsheng had intended from the very start to send An Hua and the deputy general away, but he had never expected that Nanke had long since seen through his plan and made the corresponding arrangements. This made him somewhat regretful, thinking to himself, since Nanke appeared, how could I forget about Nanke's two wings?

Zhizhi gave an angry shout.

Her spat with Nanke had been for the exact purpose of concealing Chen Changsheng's movements, and so it was hard to not be a little angry at its failure.

The naked beauty lightly embraced An Hua's neck, her demon horns faintly discernible in her waterfall of black hair. When paired with her enchantingly beautiful face, she gave an

incomparable aura of attraction. Zhizhi's small face blushed, and she spat on the ground and said, "True enough, a shameless master has shameless maids."

These two beauties possessed spiritual bodies, and it was this trait that allowed them to elude Chen Changsheng's and Zhizhi's perception and noiselessly alter the situation.

It was also because they were spiritual bodies that they were particularly vulnerable. They looked at her with boundless fear, and didn't dare retort to Zhizhi's insults.

The refined maiden dressed in the sword uniform somewhat uneasily lowered her head. The naked demon beauty was a little bolder. Although she didn't dare to retort with her own curses, she gave a laugh and straightened her body to allow those soft parts of her to stand out, those two red dots to be even more striking.

Zhizhi's monstrous pupils constricted as she shouted, "If he wasn't here, I would freeze both you and that woman together into chunks of ice!"

The demon beauty was a little taken aback, thinking to herself, why does this dragon girl hold such resentment towards this woman I've captured?

An Hua was very nervous and couldn't help but raise her head to look.

Zhizhi resentfully said to An Hua, "What are you looking at? Aren't you the source of all this trouble?"

Out of the corner of her eyes, An Hua spied the nearby stretcher with the dying array master atop it and thought, in order to save this person, just how many have already died tonight...

She felt thoroughly ashamed and lowered her head back down in silence.

Chen Changsheng looked to Zhizhi and soothed, "Is there a need to be so cranky?"

Since they were speaking to each other, their gazes naturally met.

After this long-winded conversation, in a sky filled with threads of ice, the two's gazes met.

Without any sign or warning, a sound rose up.

This sound was incredibly complex, containing at least a hundred syllables. It was incredibly bizarre and difficult to understand, seeming to contain an extremely ancient odor, as if it originated from a primordial era, and it seemed to carry infinite information.

This sound came from Zhizhi's lips.

Her expression became abnormally solemn, almost divine, and her black dress danced wildly in the wind.

A dragon cry!

Chapter 771 – The Sigh of Frost Is of No Avail Against the Dark Sky

The Dragon was the highest-level divine creature in all continents and possessed a crushing power over other creatures, especially monsters, spiritual bodies, and the like.

Upon hearing the dragon cry, the demon beauty and refined maiden instantly paled, and shrieks of pain burst from their lips. Their spiritual bodies instantly began to fade as if on the verge of scattering.

Chen Changsheng immediately took this chance to use the Yeshi Step, stepping on the position of the Chen Constellation. He retreated backwards, sweeping up An Hua and the deputy general with a wave of his right sleeve.

A single wave of his sleeve seemed to even sweep up the countless stars in the night sky, as the world suddenly went dim.

In truth, this was because the profuse stars in the sky had been obscured.

Zhizhi had vanished from her original position.

A Black Frost Dragon appeared in the night sky.

The mountain range that was the dragon's body completely

obscured the stars above the valley.

This was a most magnificent and most terrifying sight.

In Gaoyang Village, on the other side of the mountains, a drunk soldier saw this sight on the horizon and thought that he was seeing things.

When he realized that it really was a black dragon, he immediately fell unconscious.

Soon after, even more people in Gaoyang Village saw a black dragon stretching across the night sky. Screams and weeping replaced each other in turn, but never completely died away.

There were no screams or weeping in the valley, only hardy objects being frozen and torn apart.

Countless strands of Qi imbued with an icy energy shot out of the Black Frost Dragon's mouth and down to the earth.

The threads of ice drifting about the air disintegrated into the finest powder while the dry lakebed began to fracture as it froze. Before the emerging hot spring waters could begin to release any steam, they were frozen into glassy ice, and then this ice was frozen until it fractured again!

Anything in the world that was touched by this cold Qi would be frozen and then fractured!

This was the most powerful and most frightening move of the Black Frost Dragon, Deep Freeze Dragon Breath!

Deep Freeze Dragon Breath carried countless shards of frost, but not ordinary frost. This frost fell with incredible speed, acting more like a torrential rain that completely enveloped the lake and its surroundings.

With a terrifying rip, countless fine tears appeared on Nanke's dress. Traces of erosion could be seen on the Southern Cross Sword, and signs of cracking were already visible around the hilt.

In an instant, she was injured, her blood now changed in pigment by the frost splashing into the air.

A sharp and ruthless whistle burst from her lips.

The two demon beauties scattered into innumerable minute specks of light that surged behind her and formed two bewitchingly green wings.

Green light illuminated the dim lake, drawing out countless lines difficult to distinguish from each other.

Nanke was like a thunderbolt as she traversed back and forth through the ice-filled air and dodged the Deep Freeze Dragon Breath falling from the night sky.

The seal that Wang Zhice had placed on Zhizhi all those years ago had not been completely removed and Zhizhi had still not regained her full strength. Even if she had regained her strength, she was still an immature Black Frost Dragon, and the area which her Deep Freeze Dragon Breath covered was ultimately limited. If Nanke was able to fly out of the limits of the Deep Freeze Dragon Breath, she would escape this catastrophe.

Just then, another light began to shine.

It was not a green stream of light drawn out by Nanke's wings in the darkness, but a warm red glow like the reflection of the sunset in a river.

Twilight filled the ruins and a setting sun reflected its light off the night sky.

With a clang, the dagger left its sheath!

Chen Changsheng had used the move of the Three Forms of Wenshui with the fastest speed and widest range, Hanging Sunset!

Countless sword glows surged out of the sheath, akin to the innumerable streams of golden light on the surface of a river. They rose with the wind, now seeming like a net cast from a fisherman's boat.

The second technique was the Three Songs of the Fisherman of the Mount Li Sword Style.

Countless swords exploded in every direction, extremely sharp sword intents cutting at everything between the heavens and earth, forming an incredibly tight net.

Nanke might have been as fast as lightning, but not even she could avoid this net of swords in such a short amount of time and fly out of this frost-filled garden.

If she attempted to break through the net, the dragon breath raining from the sky would freeze and fracture her demon body, and if she attempted to resist the dragon breath, the myriad swords would pierce her heart!

If nothing unexpected occurred, her fate seemed sealed.

However, the Demon Lord was still present.

For some reason, Chen Changsheng and Zhizhi completely ignored the Demon Lord. From the outset, they had focused their strongest techniques completely on Nanke.

This was the case because Nanke was the weaker opponent, and the one that they could most easily break through.

As for the Demon Lord, given Chen Changsheng's and Zhizhi's strength, even if they used everything they had, they wouldn't be able to harm a hair on his head, so why bother?

And Hai Di was still here. Whether or not he was willing to ally himself with a human, he had to be keenly aware that tonight was his best and final chance.

The Deep Freeze Dragon Breath imbued with countless shards of frost fell on the lake and garden and also Hai Di's armor.

The black armor was instantly covered by countless raindrop-like ovals as the ice both corroded his armor and somewhat concealed the ripples of strength from Hai Di's body.

Hai Di would naturally strike, and he would strike with his strongest blow.

The broken monolith silently smashed towards the Demon Lord like a mountain!

Hai Di was well aware that even though the Demon Lord was heavily injured, his strength far from its peak, he was still no match.

He had no delusions of injuring the Demon Lord, only impeding him for a moment.

As long as the Demon Lord could not come to the rescue, Chen Changsheng might succeed at killing Nanke, after which they could turn the fight into three versus one and strive for sliver of hope.

It was evident that this had been Chen Changsheng's plan from the start and Hai Di acted precisely according to this plan.

What was the Demon Lord thinking? He paid no attention to the broken monolith dropping from the sky, nor did he look towards his daughter who might die at any time to the Deep Freeze Dragon Breath and countless sword Qis. Instead, he lowered his head to look at his ancient zither, his slender and firm fingers falling upon the strings and plucking.

There was a moving twang.

And then...it quickened.

Notes rose up in disarray like thousands of trees rustling as they collapsed.

Countless notes flew out from the zither strings, ignoring the Deep Freeze Dragon Breath as they shot in all directions.

The starry sky was obscured by the Black Frost Dragon's body, casting the valley and the lake into pitch-black darkness, the deepest depths of the night. Suddenly, countless sparks blazed to life in the darkness.

The sparks came from grinding and crashing. It was not rock on rock or metal against metal, but the notes of the zither grinding and crashing against swords.

The countless swords sent out by Chen Changsheng's Hanging Sunset and Three Songs of the Fisherman encountered countless zither notes.

Every encounter would release a clash and produce a flower of sparks.

From several thousand swords, several thousand zither notes, and several thousand encounters, several thousand flowers made from sparks bloomed in the air; an enormous tree of fire seemed to grow from midair.

Those sparks fell to the ground, but they were not frozen by the Deep Freeze Dragon Breath. They still blazed as they fell to the ground, flames spitting from the trunk of the tree.

The world was greatly brightened, yet it was precisely because of this that the darkness was all the more vivid.

Just like the Demon Lord's face.

Chapter 772 – With the Stretch of a Hand, the World Dies

In the sky of sparks, the Demon Lord raised his head, and the darkness and landscapes covering his face seemed to come to life.

The broken monolith was already in front of him.

He glanced at it.

It was just a glance.

The broken monolith suddenly became ten times smaller.

This was an extremely mystical, or perhaps bizarre, sight.

And then he stretched his hand.

He took hold of the broken monolith.

The broken monolith found it difficult to proceed a single inch further.

To put it more precisely, when his gaze fell on it, when his palm touched it, this legendary broken monolith was no longer willing to proceed any further.

The broken monolith had recognized who he was.

The Demon Lord looked to Hai Di and rebuked, "Evil creature, to dare use Our weapon to attack Us. We do not know whether to call you brave or foolish."

Boundless fear surged out from Hai Di's eyes. At the same time, countless motes of dust burst out from the chinks in his armor.

This dust was bursting out not because of the Qi he was releasing into the world, but because it was being shaken out of him by some power.

As the Demon Lord was speaking, the broken monolith in Hai Di's hands had shaken twenty-four thousand, eight hundred times.

As one of the strongest demons, Hai Di had a body as tough as metal, but it still could not resist such high-frequency shaking.

When the word 'foolish' entered his sea of consciousness, the wrist of the hand Hai Di was using to hold the broken monolith collapsed into gravel. Soon after, his arm bones shattered, and then countless cracks appeared on his shoulder blade.

Just like those on an ox or turtle bone that had been fired for a long time, these cracks traveled in very mysterious directions, forming frightening images.

The bones had shattered, but the flesh remained pristine. Only

Hai Di could see the fragments, gravel, and cracks in his arm.

He knew that he could not endure anymore, that he had to find a way to escape.

Ten-some streams of strangely-colored demon blood spurted out of his shoulder and his tree-like arm flew off into the sky.

Hai Di had cut off his own arm and fled without hesitation.

The Demon Lord waved his sleeve, casually and elegantly, like a scholar writing a poem after downing some wine.

In his sleeve was the hand holding the broken monolith.

With a light wave of his sleeve, the broken monolith flew understatedly, yet inexorably, into Hai Di's back.

There was a creak like that of a massive tree that towered to the heavens and had been gnawed at for countless years finally giving in to gravity and crashing to the ground.

Hai Di's chest bulged to an exaggerated level like a sudden mountain appearing overnight on the fertile plains.

An unimaginably imposing strength ran wild through his body, instantly cracking and shifting his organs. Even his Demon Core was cracked.

Hai Di was unable to withstand this massive force. He transformed into a kite that tragically drifted off to a distant snowcapped peak.

As he saw the mountain get closer and closer, although his vision was blurry from his heavy wounds and his mind was a mess, he did not forget one important problem.

Why was it this way? What of the Military Advisor?

When he was ordered here tonight, he knew in advance that searching for the master of the Cinnabar Pill was not the entire mission, so when he saw Cinnabar Pill, he was not too surprised. He was horrified to see His Majesty that he had thought dead appear once more, but even then, he had still held onto some hope.

After countless years, the demons had developed the impression that Lord Black Robe could calculate everything.

Hai Di believed that since the Military Advisor had sent him, he must have calculated the arrival of the Demon Lord and made the proper arrangements.

It was only for this reason that he dared to strike His Majesty.

He had always believed that something else would happen.

But...it hadn't.

Reality was just like that approaching peak, cold and unyielding.

In his final moments, Hai Di suddenly thought of that night two years ago.

On that night, he met that friend that he had not seen for centuries. To put it more accurately, it was his former master.

Hai Di understood, closed his eyes, and sighed in his heart.

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In the distant night sky, Hai Di's mountainous demon body had already transformed into a tiny black dot.

Compared to this truly majestic mountain, both human and demon seemed tiny and insignificant.

The little black dot plunged into the deep mantle of snow in the middle section of the peak.

A quake was sent back to the valley from that distant peak, swiftly followed by a thunderous rumbling as many years of snow

tumbled down from that mountain.

In a short time, the snowy mountain underwent a great transformation, looking completely different from its form a few moments ago.

The black hole bored into the mountain by Hai Di had vanished, leaving no trace of him behind.

Just like that, the commander of the Demon Army on the frontlines had vanished.

In this late night, this major event that should have shaken the entire continent seemed so very insignificant.

No matter how grand or tragic, no one had seen it, no one had cared.

The Demon Lord did not see, because he did not care.

When his gaze left the zither strings, his first glance had been towards the broken monolith, and his second glance had been towards the sparks filling the night sky.

And then, he stretched his hand out again.

This time, his hand pierced straight through the spark-filled air to the very highest point of the night sky.

A dragon cry filled with unwillingness and fury came down from the sky and then suddenly stopped.

Just like that, the Deep Freeze Dragon Breath, carrying countless shards of frost and imbued with killing intent, vanished.

The Black Frost Dragon covering the sky rapidly shrank into a little black point. Then, with a wave of that invisible and gigantic hand, it was hurled off into the horizon.

The black dot let off a dazzling glow as it rubbed against the air, a shooting star that ultimately crashed in some unknown place.

The Deep Freeze Dragon Breath vanished and the rain of swords momentarily slowed. Those two green streams of light suddenly vanished and Nanke appeared behind the Demon Lord.

Her petite body was covered in wounds. Blood had seeped into her clothes, making it impossible to tell what their original color was.

With the flip of his hand, the Demon Lord had shaken Hai Di to death, driven away Zhizhi, and shattered their plan.

The discrepancy between the two was too great. The Demon Lord didn't even need to strike with his full power. Simply by relying on his eyes, hands, and cultivation, he was able to easily crush them.

There was no more meaning in attacking Nanke, so Chen Changsheng summoned back all his swords.

The air howled above the valley as the several thousand swords returned. They hovered in the air around him, vibrating and buzzing.

He looked forward, silent and solemn.

Whether it was the remnants of the fire in the courtyard, the flying ash, or the residual light drifting down from the night sky, it was all cut to pieces by awe-inspiring sword intent.

At this sight, a hint of praise appeared in the Demon Lord's eyes. "Whether it's cultivation on the path of the sword, strength of spiritual sense, or quantity of true essence, you are quite excellent. Let alone this generation of youths, even when Chen Xuanba, Zhou Dufu, or myself were your age, we probably wouldn't be stronger than you."

It was very obvious that in the Demon Lord's eyes, he, Zhou Dufu, and Chen Xuanba had been the strongest experts of the past thousand years.

He differed from the general consensus in that he did not place Emperor Taizong amongst these names.

Chen Changsheng slightly leaned his body to express his thanks at this praise.

The remaining flames in the surrounding illuminated his face. Although it was very solemn, it was still very calm, devoid of any panic or fear.

Chapter 773 – Deciding Without Negotiations

"Now, no one will disturb us."

After the Demon Lord said this, he began to cough.

His coughing was like the echoing of a waterfall in a deep valley, very deep and very far. As he coughed, the landscapes covering his face slightly deformed.

Chen Changsheng looked at him and said, "Your injuries are much more serious than they were at Mount Han."

Countless years ago, the Demon Lord was defeated by Zhou Dufu and was heavily wounded, and his injuries had still not recovered. He had infiltrated Mount Han that year for the express purpose of drinking Chen Changsheng's blood and curing his wounds. In Mount Han, he and the Elder of Heavenly Secrets came into conflict, resulting in the Demon Lord's consuming a great deal of mental power. While returning to Xuelao City, he encountered the White Emperor, who had been patiently waiting for quite some time, on the snowy plains.

In that battle which shook the heavens and earth, he and the White Emperor had both lost, inflicting serious wounds against each other, and it was these wounds that directly led to that rebellion two years ago.

In this rebellion, he was knocked by the combined might of Black Robe and the Demon Commander into the abyss. Although Nanke had placed herself at enormous risk to save him, his injuries had still worsened.

For the past thousand years, he had always been the Demon Lord, but in reality, for the past thousand years, he had been a casualty, an invalid.

His current level of strength was not even a fifth of his peak. Earlier, he seemed very elegant and natural when he waved his sleeve to defeat Hai Di, but in the past, would have even needed to stretch out his hand? Most crucially of all, the state of his injuries was so awful that he might die at any moment, causing him to hurriedly seek out Chen Changsheng...to eat him.

The Demon Lord indifferently said, "Even if my injuries are worse, there are still few that can fight against me in this world."

Chen Changsheng knew that this was the truth. As he glanced at his sheath, he said, "But now you have no means of threatening me."

He had already stowed An Hua and the deputy general in the Garden of Zhou. Even if he now died, the Demon Lord had no means of killing them.

This fact and the fact that he temporarily did not need to worry about Zhizhi's safety made him even calmer.

Tonight, the demons had lost an expert like Hai Di. As long as he made sure to completely burn all the blood in his body into smoke before he died, the Demon Lord's death was assured.

He was the Pope, but he was still incredibly far from the Divine Domain, and this plan would assuredly bring a profit, at least to the Human race.

The landscapes on the Demon Lord's face suddenly became utterly frigid, like watercolor transforming into ink. "You plan to commit suicide?"

As he watched a panicked ant clamber out of a hole in the scorched earth to the right and about three feet in front of him, Chen Changsheng said, "It's all I can do."

The Demon Lord pointed at the string of stone pearls on his hand and noted, "You still have another choice."

Chen Changsheng knew what the Demon Lord was speaking of and shook his head.

At the start of the battle, he had thought that he might be able to temporarily hide in the Garden of Zhou or the Green Leaf World, but he had already given up on the notion.

Firstly, this might easily lead to the Demon Lord finding traces of his traversal through space and following him in.

This might not be much of a risk with any other opponent, but he was currently facing the Demon Lord. He knew that many years ago, the Demon Lord had entered the Garden of Zhou and snatched away a Heavenly Tome Monolith, presumably that broken monolith that Hai Di had just been using. By this point, it had already returned to being that small stone seal tied to the Demon Lord's waist.

Secondly, he had already received confirmation in Mount Han that at such a close distance, crossing through space in front of the Demon Lord was extraordinarily difficult.

Finally, Chen Changsheng was not willing to take this risk.

Even if there was only a tiny risk of being captured alive by the Demon Lord, he could not accept.

He could only negotiate. Of course, the basis of these negotiations lay in the fact that he was truly resolved to die and that the Demon Lord could clearly sense this.

Thus, he could not even carry the notion of hiding in the Garden of Zhou, not even allow himself to harbor the smallest thought of it.

The Demon Lord declared, "I will not let you die."

Chen Changsheng replied, "I became well-versed in the Daoist Canon as a child and have also cultivated for a few years, going

through many hardships. Now, I can at the very least guarantee that though I don't know where I came from, I know where I am going."

The Demon Lord asked, "Even if I kill many people to vent my anger after you die?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "I said before that I've never harbored any absurd notions of saving all living beings. I only care about the people that I can see."

"Is that so? Then you've apparently forgotten a few things."

The wind suddenly gusted and a stretcher drifted out of the ruins by the lake. Via some extremely ingenious method, it passed through the dense sword array made of several thousand swords and descended at the Demon Lord's feet. The young array master on the stretcher was still in a coma, a faint green barely visible beneath his dark skin.

"This is real, a specific person that you can see." The Demon Lord did not even glance at the stretcher, only stared into Chen Changsheng's eyes as he spoke.

As he spoke, the darkness covering his face gradually deepened, but the landscapes actually gained a few colors.

Chen Changsheng felt rather helpless.

He originally thought that this negotiation would go as Tang Thirty-Six had once described. The two sides would propose their conditions and then he would see what came next.

He had not expected that the other party would reveal his bottom line at the very beginning for him to see.

He was truly not very good at negotiations, and was even less skilled at taking care of this sort of complex problem while being threatened.

Thankfully, this complex problem was a multiple-choice question, so he could solve it by elimination.

This question had four choices.

He found it impossible to just watch as that injured person on the stretcher was killed by the Demon Lord, or perhaps subjected to the cruelest of tortures, as he could not endure such a thing.

He also could not really cast aside his sword and surrender, convert his body into a pill, and offer it to the Demon Lord to take just because of this person.

So only two choices were left.

He was not at his final and most hopeless situation, so he could push the choice of burning his blood and suicide back a little, leaving the last choice.

Attack.

His mind worked very quickly to reach this decision, using the simplest method to resolve this complicated problem.

Attacking, fighting, and then dying was very simple, much better than struggling about how to choose and growing increasingly apprehensive as time dragged on.

He threw the dagger in his hand.

It was called Stainless and it truly was Stainless. It was absolutely smooth and absolutely sharp, its body able to reflect all sights.

It reflected the shredded frost, the floating embers, and the slightly deformed stars.

A stream of light tore through the night sky as it shot towards the Demon Lord.

Several thousand renowned swords followed, appearing just like a dragon.

At this sight, Nanke's eyes narrowed. She very naturally recalled that battle in the Garden of Zhou.

At the time, she had relied on the Soul Pivot to become one with

the Golden-winged Great Peng, her cultivation level reaching the Divine, yet she had ultimately been handed a miserable defeat by this sword dragon.

The current Chen Changsheng was naturally much stronger than he had been back then, but the circumstances had changed. This sword dragon undoubtedly did not have the might it had back then, but she was still a little worried. This was because her father truly had been severely injured all this time, and it was also because this sword dragon was clearly different from the sword dragon in the Garden of Zhou.

Upon careful examination, one would realize that those several thousand swords were all vibrating, their might not yet unleashed.

What was not unleashed yet was not sword energy, but sword techniques.

Those several thousand swords were all vibrating and giving off a feeling of might not yet unleashed because Chen Changsheng had not yet truly attacked.

He had bestowed a sword technique upon each sword in the night sky and was still building power.

When these several thousand swords simultaneously unleashed their sword techniques, how much momentum would they have?

Chapter 774 – Behind the Three Thousand Swords

Upon seeing the several thousand swords in the night sky, Nanke narrowed her eyes.

Using one's spiritual sense to control several thousand swords was already an absurd enough feat, but to also simultaneously unleash several thousand different sword techniques...

Just how had Chen Changsheng done it?

It was at this point that she was finally sure that even if Chen Changsheng did not have these swords or any other tricks, just through his sword insight, true essence, and cultivation in the path of the sword, he could defeat her. If she were to engage in a direct confrontation with Chen Changsheng and did not possess the fastest speed in the world, she would not have a single chance.

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The Demon Lord was the strongest opponent Chen Changsheng had ever encountered. When confronting such a foe, he naturally used his strongest moves.

These swords in the night sky were the highest level and most

complete display of his attainments on the path of the sword.

Of the old swords that had followed him out of the Sword Pool in the Garden of Zhou and regained their freedom, some had been seen back to their sects and some had been gifted to friends. Xuanyuan Po had received the Mountain Sea Sword, Zhexiu had received the Demon Commander's Banner Sword, and Su Moyu and Mo Yu had also been given their own swords. Many swords had also been taken by Tang Thirty-Six and hidden around the Orthodox Academy, and Chen Changsheng had not taken them with him when he left the capital. If one removed those old swords that were too old, required their sword intents to soak in more nourishment, and were thus powerless to battle, the swords that could fight together with him at present numbered around three thousand.

These swords had rested in the Vault Sheath for quite a few years now and were his constant companions. Their minds were one, their edges as sharp as if they were forged yesterday, their energies surpassing their past selves.

Tonight, these thousands of swords reflected all scenes and light in the darkness, silently forming a dragon. They seemed to come in succession, yet they also seemed to come together. Their sword intents were all awe-inspiring but each of their sword techniques had its own subtlety. They were extremely difficult to deal with, and if Zhu Ye, Ning Shiwei, and those several hundred experts and soldiers had still been on the lake shore, they would have been routed with a single blow.

The three thousand swords flew through the air as if they had

brought the thousands of golden scales glistening in the river up into the darkness.

The Demon Lord once more revealed an expression of praise, ruefully sighing, "The sword is like the person. If you break through into the Divine in the future, just how spectacular and magnificent would this sword dragon be?"

A rueful sigh was an expression of regret, regret that this spectacular and magnificent sight would never come to be, because Chen Changsheng would become his food tonight.

Praise was looking down upon someone from up high, the assessment and expectation of a predecessor to their descendant. Praise came to be because the one giving praise was at ease.

Three thousand swords, each carrying a different attack, were easily broken by a zither tune from the Demon Lord.

His firm and slender fingers lightly plucked the strings, unleashing chilling notes.

Tonight, the zither had already sounded several times, and one of those times was when it had broken through Chen Changsheng's first sword array.

But those had all been messy and fragmentary notes, unable to transform into a song, more like a prelude or interlude.

Now, the zither notes finally came together into a song.

The song the Demon Lord played was a melody on the delights of the autumn wind.

What was delightful about the autumn wind were falling leaves, so the zither notes were even more chilling than before, blowing in all directions like an autumn mountain, a natural dispersal, like the falling leaves themselves.

Zither notes carelessly flew into the air, carrying an indescribable bleakness and harshness as they went to meet the sword dragon tearing through the night sky.

Just like before, bright fragments of fiery flowers exploded in the air, illuminating the world and making that sword dragon that spanned across the world even more vivid.

The three thousand swords fiercely trembled. Some found it difficult to bear the wounds from the zither notes and suddenly descended, while others found it hard to bear the strength of the autumn wind and skewed to the side.

A gale rose, the zither notes suddenly fell into disorder, and the sword dragon began to slowly disperse. Like scales being shorn off by some invisible force, a sword would occasionally leave the pack.

Those swords that still persisted began to shudder. Some of these swords with weaker bodies were already showing cracks.

Based on the situation, before Chen Changsheng's three thousand swords were able to reach their destination, they would be broken and scattered by this zither song.

But for some reason, the Demon Lord suddenly became somewhat grave.

This was the first time tonight he had revealed a wary expression.

At this moment, the sword dragon formed from three thousand swords was spitting sparks into the night sky.

He gazed at a certain point amongst these sparks.

This was a very unremarkable position, and the collision of zither note against sword did not produce many sparks here, but in his eyes, it was somewhat scorching.

The trajectory at which that flower of sparks sputtered apart was deviating ever so slightly from the trajectory it should have had.

This was an incredibly small deviation, practically insignificant. A normal person, and even Chen Changsheng himself, would be unable to see, but it could not escape the Demon Lord's gaze.

The Demon Lord's indifferent gaze could pierce through the

principles of this world.

The deviation in the trajectory of the sparks signified that the space in that position was very slightly deformed.

A deformation of space meant that some extremely heavy object was hidden behind those sparks.

Both sides knew that the sparks were the result of the swords clashing with the zither notes.

An item that could cause space to deform logically had to be utterly gigantic, something like the entirety of Mount Han.

But for such an item to be hidden behind the sparks meant that it had to be extremely small.

Just what item in the world could be so small and yet so heavy?

Perhaps that was truly Chen Changsheng's last hidden move?

The Demon Lord suddenly waved his hand.

The zither strings all snapped.

Chaotic notes shot forward.

The ancient zither was instantly annihilated, transforming into countless splinters of wood and snapped threads.

Those splinters, snapped threads, and chaotic zither notes shot together into the night sky.

Countless chilling, grating, and heavy collisions resounded in the air.

The sword dragon in the air shot out even more sparks and then gradually dispersed.

Before the sword techniques contained within the three thousand swords had the time to exhibit their power, they had been shattered by the Demon Lord!

The sky of sparks seemed to collide against an autumn wind, withering away in the space of a few breaths. The view of the night sky became clearer, and some objects could no longer keep themselves hidden.

A very small stone pearl was flying through the darkness at the Demon Lord. This stone pearl flew very slowly, giving off a feeling of great weight. It seemed to be pulled along by an invisible force, at the same time pulling the surrounding world with it, causing the nearby space to slightly warp.

The Demon Lord had a rather unfathomable expression on his face as he said, "The Garden of Zhou truly did fall into your hands."

He was naturally speaking to Chen Changsheng.

Then, he raised his right hand and pointed at the stone pearl.

Tonight, the first time he had raised his hand, he had grasped the Heavenly Tome Monolith and then smashed Hai Di into a distant peak.

The second time, he had snatched the Black Dragon high in the sky and cast her towards the distant horizon.

Now, as he raised his hand for the third time, his expression was much more solemn than the last two times.

His movement was very subtle, like he was picking up clouds. At the same time, it was very grandiose, like he was plucking stars.

With his movements, the stone pearl slowly came to a stop.

Simultaneously, the stone seal floated from his waist and into the sky.

The seal and the stone pearl quietly stood across from each other, in a stalemate, vibrating as they buzzed.

The violent and turbulent Qis contained between the two were gradually pacified.

It was like old friends reuniting, but also like a meeting of foes, each with their own emotions as they silently regarded each other.

Chapter 775 – Still Another Move

The stone pearl looked very ordinary and there seemed nothing special about the stone seal.

Only the extraordinary individuals of the Divine Domain could clearly sense the violent energies that could wreak havoc on the world contained within them.

Ever since he had snuck into the Garden of Zhou all those years ago, that seal had remained tied to his waist, so he was very experienced with such matters. Consequently, he could determine that the Garden of Zhou had now fallen into Chen Changsheng's hands, but he could not understand for the moment just how Chen Changsheng could use the stone pearl given his current cultivation level.

After all, even with his own profound cultivation, he still had to handle the seal with care, so how could Chen Changsheng do it?

Another three stone pearls flew through the darkness.

A storm suddenly descended upon the world of the Demon Lord's face, making it appear incredibly bleak.

With a thought, the seal's position in the night sky went through an extremely subtle adjustment, and a small gust emerged from nowhere.

The Demon Lord emitted a Qi as deep as the darkness, but it soon became abnormally bright and upright, seemingly divine.

The position of the seal and the change in his Qi fell upon the four stone pearls. This was interaction and also questioning, communication.

The berserk Qis of the three stone pearls were also gradually pacified.

The stone pearls and the seal floated in the night sky. Glimmering in reflected starlight, they looked just like real stars.

They silently stood across from each other, their positions seemingly unchanging and eternal, looking just like a star chart.

Even this is possible? Chen Changsheng was stunned at this sight. He felt that the wind blowing across his face had gotten much colder, the chill piercing into his bones.

"Many years ago, I comprehended the wondrous knowledge of the ordering of the stars from studying the star charts in the Mausoleum of Books. I didn't expect that only after more than a thousand years would I have a chance to use it for the first time."

When he thought of those ancient matters, even the Demon Lord felt emotional. He looked at that stone seal and the pearls in the night like he was looking at the future.

The Heavenly Tome Monoliths that Chen Changsheng had obtained in the Garden of Zhou were unquestionably his strongest, and also final, move, but now it had been stopped. Shortly the Demon Lord would drink Chen Changsheng's true blood, and with the acquisition of so many Heavenly Tome Monoliths, those wounds that had lingered for a thousand years would probably recover in a single day. There was even a chance that he might break through.

He would then return to Xuelao City and slaughter all those traitors, cast his unfilial son into the abyss, and seat himself upon the throne once more. He would lead the army south, pass through Tianliang and enter the capital, break past Mount Li and march until the Southern Sea, finally uniting the continent. He would then construct countless great ships and cross the Eastern Sea, making landfall on the Great Western Continent and becoming the true master of the world!

Finally...he would lead the three races on an expedition, using a grandiose momentum to sweep through the Sacred Light Continent and accomplish an unprecedented feat!

Countless scenes flashed past the Demon Lord's eyes. A tyrannical aura gradually manifested around him, and his lips gradually perked upwards, his joy reaching its peak.

He waved his sleeve at the darkness, effortlessly knocking down the last several dozen swords.

At this moment, he thought that he would see the ideal conclusion, yet he did not expect that he would first see a pair of

eyes.

These were Chen Changsheng's eyes, bright and calm, serious and focused. There was no despair, not even a sense of defeat within them.

Chen Changsheng did not remain where he stood to await his defeat. From the moment he attacked, he had already left the ground, charging towards the Demon Lord.

Behind the three thousand swords piercing through the world were the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, and behind the Heavenly Tome Monolith was himself, but rather than a sword, he held a letter.

There was already a tear in this letter.

Upon seeing this letter, the Demon Lord's eyes narrowed, an intense vigilance emerging within them.

His strength tonight was far from its peak and he was certainly not invincible, but he was still powerful. This was especially the case in terms of cultivation and awareness, where he had always occupied the highest point of the world.

Only a scant few could trigger his instinctive sense of danger.

There was one in the Great Western Continent.

There were two in White Emperor City.

Only one remained in the capital.

Where had this letter come from? Just who had written it?

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The most famous letters in the world were those written between the Demon Grand Scholar Tungus and the Pope of the Human race countless years ago. The most intelligent figures in the world had ignored the deep sea of blood and resentment between the Human and Demon races and discussed many important problems within their letters, which they published to the world.

Both the Council of Elders in Xuelao City and the Imperial clan in the capital were deeply concerned about this relationship and wanted to protest, but none dared to, as the statuses of these two figures were too high. At the time, there had been no Great Zhou Dynasty, but the Daoist religion was still the Orthodoxy, and the Pope possessed an incredible prestige and authority. Tungus had been the teacher to several generations of Demon Lords, so his status was similarly unquestionable.

After these letters, the next most famous was that denouncement of Tianhai spread across the world after the bloody incident of the

Orthodox Academy twenty-some years ago.

Although it was a denouncement, it could also be considered a letter that the Chen Imperial clan and the conservative faction of the Orthodoxy had written to the people of the world.

In the most recent few years, the most famous letters had naturally been the letters that Su Li had left for the world before taking the Holy Maiden to travel to the other continent. One letter had killed one elder of the Longevity Sect and heavily injured a few others while also shattering the sect's great array, severing a few secret paths of retreat. Another letter had chopped off Zhu Luo's arm in the Myriad Willows Garden outside Hanqiu City. One letter had been sent to the Orthodox Academy, passing on sword intent to Chen Changsheng, routing Wuqiong Bi of the Storms of the Eight Directions, and even engaging in a battle with the Tianhai Divine Empress's Wooden Sword Little Phoenix in the night sky over the capital.

Other than the writer Su Li, the deliverer Xu Yourong, and a few people within the Orthodox Academy, no one knew that Su Li had actually left four letters to the world.

Three letters had been opened and used, but there was still one letter that had remained in Chen Changsheng's bosom this entire time.

He had not used it in the Mausoleum of Books, as he had not known which side to choose between the Divine Empress and the Pope, and even if he had used it, it wouldn't have been able to change the situation. He had not used it when killing Zhou Tong,

as he was confident, and this letter was too important and unique, so it was too much of a waste to use it on Zhou Tong. The only time he had almost used the letter was when Eunuch Lin had entered the Orthodox Academy with the resolve to kill him, and also on that night...when his teacher Shang Xingzhou had made his way to him through the snow.

Tonight, his opponent was no ordinary person, but the Demon Lord.

In the face of such a legend, this mythical being, Chen Changsheng had no illusions of being able to escape through a fluke. He had chosen without hesitation to use all the moves he had.

The swords of the Garden of Zhou, the monoliths of the Mausoleum of Books, and the letter from Mount Li.

The letter instantly exploded as an invisible sword intent soared upward on a whirlwind towards the stars.

The starlight shattered and the sword intent became real, stabbing straight at the Demon Lord.

A light splitting sound could be heard in the darkness.

It was like water being parted, clouds being halved, the sky being cleaved in two.

Those landscapes were cleaved apart.

That world was cleaved apart.

That darkness was cleaved apart.

The layers of mist that had shrouded the Demon Lord's face for countless years were forcefully cut open by the incredible might of that sword intent.

His true face appeared in the world.

His suddenly rising eyebrows like inky mountains.

His hawkish eyes, as unfathomably cold as a dark pool.

The Demon Lord's palms came together.

It was like two mountains that had stood sentinel on two banks of a river for countless years coming together.

The sword intent Su Li had left behind was caught between them.

A straight and vivid wound appeared on the Demon Lord's face.

It was right between those inky mountains, right between those

dark pools.

Chapter 776 – The Last Three Moves, Darkness, and Opening Eyes

What was Chen Changsheng's strongest move? Logically speaking, it was naturally the Heavenly Tome Monoliths. Whether it was the black stone he had obtained from Wang Zhice's portrait in the Lingyan Pavilion or those stone pearls from the Garden of Zhou that had been tied around his wrist for many years, they were the most important objects in the world, supreme existences that were absolutely irreplaceable.

But the Heavenly Tome Monoliths were too profound, and it was simply impossible for him to completely comprehend them at his current level. In normal circumstances, he could only use them to nurture his spiritual sense and was unable to use them in battle. However, he had still concealed the Heavenly Tome Monoliths behind the three thousand swords tonight, tossing them towards the Demon Lord. This was because he was well aware that the Demon Lord was the person in the world that most understood the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, so it was highly likely for his mind to be shaken.

Shaking his mind was a more refined way of speaking. To put it more coarsely, he just want to give the Demon Lord a fright.

Only by giving Demon Lord a fright would he be able to conceal his final move and create a surprise.

It now seemed that his plan had succeeded.

The landscapes and darkness covering the Demon Lord's face had been cleaved open and an extremely thin and clear wound had appeared between his eyes, from which blood now flowed.

The blood of the Demon Lord naturally was not red, but surprisingly it wasn't green either. It was gold.

Seeing the Demon Lord's face covered in golden blood, Chen Changsheng suddenly thought of a face on the stone wall of the Great Hall of Light.

That had been the face of a celestial god, and also a demon god.

An extremely callous voice rose up, echoing through the mountain ranges and gradually resonating between the heavens and earth.

The howling winds between the mountains and the snow still rumbling down the side of the distant solitary peak became even more terrifying, crossing through the opening in the mountain range and shattering countless lanterns several dozen li away in Gaoyang Village.

The Demon Lord looked into Chen Changsheng's eyes and said, "Even if Su Li were here himself, he wouldn't be able to kill me with a single slash, and this is nothing more than a strand of sword intent he left behind."

As he spoke, no emotion could be seen on his face. It was

abnormally indifferent, suffused with a matchless solemnity and absolute divinity.

Then, he suddenly began to laugh, revealing his mouth filled with pure white teeth.

As it laughed this divine face seemed to gain the emotions of a living being, not emotions of peace, but primal, barbaric, and terrifying emotions.

Chen Changsheng looked at the Demon Lord's white teeth, his body cold. Ever since leaving Xining Village and going to the capital, up until tonight, his greatest anxiety had arisen from the temptation of his true blood, but in reality, in the past few years, the only person to truly state the intention of drinking his blood and feasting on his flesh...had been the Demon Lord. This was now his second try.

An unimaginably grand power had crushed the last sword intent Su Li had left in this world.

That strength imbued with that primal and chaotic Qi did not disappear, but traveled along the path created by the now-vanished sword intent toward Chen Changsheng.

Countless tiny impacts resounded out almost simultaneously, like a forest in midsummer suffering a sudden chill, causing countless insects to fall to the hard earth.

Chen Changsheng's arm bones were instantly shattered into several hundred fragments, after which his shoulder blades and breastbone also began to crack, just like the dried-up lakebed he was currently standing in.

A spurt of blood shot out of his mouth and struck the Demon Lord's face.

The golden blood was diluted by the red and those broken landscapes seemed to enter twilight, the sunset casting its glow over countless corpses drenched in blood.

Traveling in the exact opposite direction of that blood, Chen Changsheng took leave of the ground and retreated backwards.

A hint of surprise flashed across the Demon Lord's eyes.

In order to destroy Su Li's sword intent, he had paid no small price, and the injuries that he had suppressed for two years had suddenly broken out again.

And yet Chen Changsheng did not die and could even move, clearly surpassing the limits of what his body should be able to bear at his current level of cultivation.

It appeared that his body was even stronger than the bodies of demon experts, but why?

Icy winds howled as Chen Changsheng retreated backwards, his

body flickering in and out of view. He was incredibly difficult to catch, appearing to be in several places at the same time.

Countless stars twinkled in the darkness, and as his feet tread on the darkness, he stepped on the positions of the stars. From the moment he began his retreat, he had begun using the Yeshi Step.

His body had been bathed in the true blood of the Black Dragon and possessed an unimaginable level of toughness, the second surprise he had given the Demon Lord.

This was his last chance to escape.

He only needed to take this final step and he would be able to break out of the darkness and reach a certain place in the ruins of the courtyard.

He had prepared an array there, along with an incredibly secretive path that led deeper into the mountains.

Of course, even if he reached that place, he might not be able to escape. After all, his opponent tonight was the Demon Lord.

No matter how many moves, preparations, or surprises he had, none of it gave him any confidence. Perhaps it was precisely because he was not completely confident that before he made this final step, Chen Changsheng snatched through the air at the black stone in the darkness. At the same time, his spiritual sense fell on the ground.

A stretcher lay in front of the Demon Lord. On the stretcher was the young array master.

Chen Changsheng was confident that he could send the young array master into the Garden of Zhou. This way, even if he couldn't survive, the young array master might still have some hope.

However, just when his spiritual sense fell on the stretcher, something very strange happened.

An extremely weak yet bizarre Qi followed his spiritual sense into his body and struck his Ethereal Palace.

This was a very stealthy strike and not at all powerful, but it very exquisitely disrupted his true essence circulation.

Crucially, he was currently using the Yeshe Step.

The smallest error would result in failure.

To go south while walking north was a mistake.

His next step should have stepped on the ground next to an old plum tree several dozen zhang away.

Now, it stepped on air.

His feet fell on the night sky.

It was colder here, the wind faster, as he was now several dozen zhang in the air.

The wind howled and a shadow shut out the stars, accompanied by a cruel and ruthless cry.

Intense pain came from his shoulders and neck.

Nanke appeared behind him, her sharp fingernails infused with a green light grabbing his arms, carrying him higher into the sky. Even more frightening was that some sort of invisible string had appeared between her two wings and was constantly hacking at his throat. In a flash, it had already sunk into his flesh and caused blood to drip out.

The Demon Lord looked at the scene in the sky and licked the blood at the corner of his lips, calm and expectant.

With a daughter who had the fastest speed in the world, he was utterly unconcerned about the prospect of Chen Changsheng escaping.

Chen Changsheng had been caught by Nanke and seemed powerless to resist. He could only wait to be killed and then eaten.

Just like how his body was high up in the cold sky, there was no place from which he could borrow power.

But he would not surrender. Not even fate had been able to make him submit, so how could a real foe or plight do it?

In the wilderness, he had learned three swords from Su Li.

At this time, he chose without hesitation to use the mightiest of them, the Blazing Sword.

This attack was composed of three sword techniques.

The True Sword of the Orthodoxy was also called the Sword of Slaughter. In the last battle of the Grand Examination all those years ago, he had used this attack to force Gou Hanshi to retreat.

The final move of the Mount Li Sword Style had been used by Liang Xiaoxiao in the Garden of Zhou to commit suicide and put himself into a wretched state, and Chen Changsheng had also used it once.

Tonight, he used these two resolute techniques at the same time.

He did not believe that Nanke had the ability to stop him...from dying.

As for the last technique...it naturally had to be Mount Li's Secret

Sword of the Golden Crow.

I can burn the heavens, earth, and man into nothing. What can you do about it?

Nanke could not comprehend his sword intent, but she sensed what he was attempting to do, and even someone as cold as her felt a little fear.

These three sword techniques were too fast, too desperate.

The Demon Lord's callous voice spoke once more. "You want to die? It's not that easy."

Chen Changsheng's flesh was his final hope. He would not allow anyone to snatch it away, including Chen Changsheng.

He stretched out his hand towards the sky and a sheet of darkness fell towards Chen Changsheng!

He wanted to use his incomparably tyrannical and most powerful demon technique to swallow up Chen Changsheng's last three moves!

His expression was so stern, so focused, that he didn't notice...

Right in front of him.

Right at his feet.

Right on that stretcher.

The young array master suddenly opened his eyes.

Chapter 777 – Astral Executioner

From the battlefield to the Mount Song Army headquarters to the snowy mountain range, no one had ever seen the young array master on the stretcher open his eyes.

In everyone's view, he was already on his last gasps, as his heavy wounds were incurable.

At this moment, his eyes had opened.

On the most shallow level, his eyes contained a bright and clean innocence, but if one looked a little deeper, one would see a cruelty full of savage Qi.

Innocence and cruelty were complete opposites, yet they were often two emotions born together. When combined, they formed an extremely complex and profound emotion.

At this time, Nanke and Chen Changsheng were high up in the cold sky.

Chen Changsheng was preparing to use his last three moves to end all the Demon Lord's hopes.

The Demon Lord was preparing to use his most tyrannical move to end all of Chen Changsheng's hopes.

No one noticed the young array master open his eyes; no one noticed his hand resting on his chest.

A few days ago, he been quite heavily injured in the great battle on the snowy plains, and the wound he had suffered was there.

The young array master's hand left his chest, his hand carrying away some fluid, but also holding something else.

It was a pestle-like object made of stone, its surface particularly mottled, perhaps because it was stained in blood or for some other reason.

The young array master gripped the stone pestle and thrust it towards the Demon Lord's abdomen.

He lay on the stretcher, so he could only strike from below. In terms of both angle and intentions, he seemed abnormally sinister and vicious.

But he acted like he was carrying out a divine task, even appearing rather pious.

His actions were not slow and were rather casual, yet they also seemed to be carried out with great prudence and focus.

This entire process occurred noiselessly, not even stirring the smallest breeze.

Not even the Demon Lord sensed it, but he was not someone that could be so easily assassinated.

He did not sense that sinister stone pestle, but the stone seal in the night responded.

The stone seal was a Heavenly Tome Monolith that he had brought out of the Garden of Zhou and that had accompanied him in his travels through the world for several centuries. He had long since perceived its truths and become one with it.

If anyone attempted to menace the Demon Lord's life, the stone seal would automatically act to defend and counterattack.

For the past several centuries, countless experts from both the Human race and the Council of Elders in Xuelao City had attempted to assassinate the Demon Lord, and all of them had failed, amongst their number the miserable defeat of Hai Di in the battle just now. Their failures were all because of this stone seal.

The stone seal ignored the stone pearls and vanished from the darkness.

In the next moment, it appeared in front of the Demon Lord's abdomen to meet the stone pestle.

Logically speaking, regardless of what the stone pestle was actually made of, it could not be any stronger than a Heavenly

Tome Monolith. It seemed like it would soon be battered into fine powder.

However, something utterly inconceivable occurred.

The stone seal paused in the wind, ceasing its attempts to destroy the stone pestle.

It was like it had recognized this pestle from many thousands of years ago and had even yielded the path.

Without the restraint of the stone seal, the remaining Heavenly Tome Monoliths howled as they flew into the darkness, the star chart instantly broken.

The Demon Lord finally sensed danger, but it was already too late.

He lowered his head and saw that a stone pestle had been deeply thrust into his abdomen.

The other end of the stone pestle was grasped in the hand of the young array master.

The Demon Lord could clearly sense the chill from the stone pestle.

Of course, what made him feel even colder was the face of the

young array master and the subtle ripples of Qi exuded by the stone pestle.

Countless feeble yet inextinguishable ripples of Qi floated into the night sky as if wanting to tell the entire world of his location.

Whether it was this world or another, it told all worlds.

Just what was this enigmatic stone pestle?

The Daoist Canon of the Human race contained no records of it, and no information could be found about it in White Emperor City. Only the master of the Demon Palace in Xuelao City could possibly know of its origins.

Because this stone pestle and the story attached to it was a forbidden secret of the Demon race.

The Demon Lord naturally knew what it was.

It was a divine artifact that had never before appeared in this world.

The Astral Executioner.

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A furious roar ripped through the night.

Green wings tore through the darkness, and Nanke transformed into a stream of light as she lunged toward the ground, tossing Chen Changsheng to the side.

Just before her wrathful Qi could approach, the young array master floated up from the stretcher and noiselessly drifted several dozen zhang away.

He was just like the drifting dust over the ground, traveling randomly, with extremely strange movements. Of course, this also exposed his extremely profound cultivation.

In normal times, Nanke would have been willing to pay any price to use this chance to kill him, but now was not the time.

She rushed over to the Demon Lord, but before she could get close, she was sent into the distance by a wave of the Demon Lord's sleeve.

Chen Changsheng also fell on the ground, not far from the Demon Lord.

With just a stretch of his hand, the Demon Lord would be able to kill or seize Chen Changsheng, and then drink his blood and feed on his flesh. Just like that, he would be reborn and regain his

freedom.

But the Demon Lord did not do this, or even glance at Chen Changsheng.

His thousand years of old injuries and his thousand years of desires could all be fulfilled from Chen Changsheng's body, but he suddenly seemed to not care.

The Demon Lord lowered his head to his own body, to the stone pestle embedded in his abdomen. He pulled it out and threw it to the ground.

The mottled spots on the stone pestle had already been completely eroded away by the golden blood, leaving only its crude surface.

But there were still a few objects remaining on his abdomen. They gave off a dark blue glow, looking just like stars.

This dark blue light sent faint ripples of Qi towards the starry sky.

The Demon Lord's belt dragged out image after image in the darkness. The stone seal flew through the air, howling as it landed and then went still.

Nobody knew that in this brief moment, he had traveled one thousand li and back.

No matter where he went, he could not escape that dark blue light.

The weak Qi was not affected in the slightest, continuing to clearly send his position towards the starry sky.

As expected, what could not be escaped was fate.

The Demon Lord turned to the starry sky above him, revealing an incredibly complex expression.

It was disdain, anger, and unwillingness, but all this ultimately transformed into a strand of sorrow.

Fate was the starry sky.

If the starry sky itself wanted to kill someone, how could they possibly avoid it?

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Chen Changsheng's gaze also fell on the starry sky.

His spiritual sense drifted upward, surpassing the concept of time

and crossing the endlessly long river of stars, reaching that extremely distant red star.

His Fated Star was continuously providing him warmth and strength, confidence and courage.

This place was incredibly far from the ground, seemingly at the other shore of the river of stars. It was extremely spacious here, with only a few stars around.

He looked even further, to that even deeper place, and suddenly felt fear.

Over there was infinite darkness, and it also seemed to contain countless twinkling stars, an enigmatic unknown that inspired fear.

Suddenly, a beam of bright light emerged from those distant and seemingly unreal stars, shooting straight towards his Fated Star!

Sweat instantly soaked Chen Changsheng's clothes and was quickly frozen into ice by his fear.

Just what was this beam of light? Where had it come from and where was it going?

Fortunately, the beam of light did not strike his Fated Star, merely brushed past.

Afterwards, the beam of light crossed the river of stars and shot towards this world.

Chen Changsheng's body became as stiff as board. He could not move a muscle or even make a noise.

The Demon Lord raised his head towards the starry sky, his expression indifferent, his thoughts inscrutable.

From the distance came Nanke's enraged roar.

A light broke through the night sky and fell amongst the mountains.

It fell on the Demon Lord's body.

Chapter 778 – A Spot of Brightness Amongst the Black Mountain and White Waters

The pillar of light did not come from the stars, but from the unknown world even further away. When it hit the ground, it was only one zhang in radius. From this, one could tell just how condensed it was.

Only the purest and most powerful of energies, perhaps coming from one of the gods of legend, could produce such a condensed beam of light.

This beam of light appeared very much like the Sacred Light of the Orthodoxy, but the Demon Lord knew that it was not, as did Chen Changsheng. They both knew where this light had come from.

Within the hallowed pillar of light, the Demon Lord's clothes fluttered. The shattered landscapes on the Demon Lord's face were completely washed away as the Demon Lord began to rapidly age.

At some point, the stone seal that was a Heavenly Tome Monolith had left the bounds of the pillar of light, and quietly floated in the air.

The seal seemed to face the Demon Lord in the pillar of light as if filled with sorrow, reminiscing on many things, bidding farewell to an old friend.

The pillar of light vanished.

Nothing changed in the mountains or in the ruins of the courtyard. Mountains did not collapse and snow did not tumble down; there was no phenomenon in the world, no descent of some abyss. All was as before, as if nothing had happened.

The Demon Lord stood at his original position.

Nanke was currently rushing over.

The young array master had an extremely complex expression on his face.

He looked at the Demon Lord, opening his mouth and closing it three times as if wanting to say something, but ultimately remaining silent.

The Demon Lord drew back his gaze from the starry sky and looked at the young array master, silent and pensive.

Nanke arrived and fell silent at the scene before her.

Silence that was just seeking time eventually had to be broken.

"Sir is just about done, right?"

The young array master softly asked the Demon Lord, appearing very cautious and even a little timid.

The Demon Lord replied, "If you could not even confirm this and yet risked going south anyway, then you are a fool."

The young array master was very sure that he was no fool, so he began to laugh.

It was a hearty laugh.

In the very next moment, the satisfied smile on his face vanished, transforming into tears of sorrow.

It was a wailing lament.

He laughed and wept, was happy and then sad, pained and then cheerful, humble and then arrogant.

He was like a temperamental child, appearing both wronged and a little proud. As he cried, he said to the Demon Lord, "This time is okay, right?"

The Demon Lord sighed, "It's okay."

The young array master wept, "Then you'll finally die this time?"

The Demon Lord calmly said, "Yes."

The array master's expression became somewhat tense. He licked his dry lips and asked, "Didn't I do really well this time?"

The Demon Lord looked at him with praise. "This trap was truly excellent."

Upon hearing this praise, the young array master's face instantly lit up, and even his steps lightened.

He walked over to the Demon Lord, his hands and feet waving, jumping about like a stone tumbling down a mountain.

Her face rather pale, Nanke wanted to come over, but was stopped by the Demon Lord's gaze.

The young array master walked up to the Demon Lord's side and carefully helped him sit down as if not wanting the Demon Lord to feel any pain.

He looked very seriously at the Demon Lord and said, "Father, does it hurt?"

The Demon Lord looked at the array master, his eyes filled with love and satisfaction. "It's fine."

The array master used his wrist to wipe a few tears off his

eyelashes and said, "I also don't want to do this."

As he spoke, his right hand fell like a black lightning bolt onto the Demon Lord's abdomen.

It was a pitch-black dagger that seemed to suck in all light.

This dagger stabbed deeply into the Demon Lord's abdomen, and golden blood gushed out from the dagger's hilt.

It appeared that this dagger was actually hollow.

The Demon Lord painfully coughed, "You...shouldn't be using... this sword."

"Because this is the precious object of Sir's friend?" The young array master pulled the black dagger out of the Demon Lord's abdomen, glanced at the nearby ground, then said in a huff, "Even that guy can use a dragon whisker as a sword, and I am Sir's son, so why can't I use it?"

Chen Changsheng was lying on the ground over there.

The array master pulled the Demon Lord's hand from under his body and strenuously broke each finger, extracting an item from within.

The Demon Lord's expression was as serene as ever, as if he

simply couldn't feel the pain of having his fingers broken.

The item in his hand appeared to be something like a goat horn comb. Whatever it was, it was probably the Demon Lord's last move to save his life.

If the young array master had not promptly struck and severed his last thread of life, perhaps the Demon Lord truly might have found a chance to counterattack.

"Big Aunt warned me that when confronting Sir, I had to be careful, and then even more careful."

The young array master looked at the goat horn comb and fearfully said, "But no matter how careful I could be, I would never have imagined that the Heavenly Demon Horn was in Sir's hands."

He carefully put away the goat horn comb in his bosom and smiled at the Demon Lord. "Didn't Sir say that when Little Aunt left Xuelao City twenty-some years ago, she ran away with this divine object? Father, you are truly crafty. We all thought that it was in Mount Li."

The Demon Lord smiled, "Your little aunt was so foolish that she was tricked into leaving by little, little Su. I had to discipline him a little."

The array master thought of that bloody incident that had taken place in the Longevity Sect and sorrowfully said, "What need was

there for such excessive discipline? Fortunately, Sir should no longer be able to continue disciplining me."

At this moment, the Demon Lord's fate was sealed and he had no more cards to play. Counterattack was now impossible.

Only after confirming all the particulars did the array master finally relax. He sat down by the Demon Lord and wiped the cold sweat off his brow, only calming down after catching his breath for a few moments. Suddenly, he laughed at the starry sky and shook his head, apparently taken by some indescribable emotion.

"In truth, I was also afraid, but what could I do? I still had to do it. Thankfully, I won in the end."

Whether in the silence at the start or the madness at the end, whether standing, sitting, or lying down, the Demon Lord, the young array master, and Nanke were all quite similar. Perhaps they were rather different on the outside, but they were completely identical in terms of essence and personality, especially when they were together.

They were just like that black mountain in the extreme north, the white water and that bloody moon, exuding cruelty, blood, and mystery, yet also an incomparable harmony.

If they had remained undisturbed, perhaps this scene would have persisted for even longer, but there was still a human in this painting.

And it was precisely because he was human that he could not stand in this painting.

Chen Changsheng stood up and this painting instantly gained a few bright shades of color.

An incredibly firm brightness rose up from his eyes and his voice.

"From the battlefield to the Mount Song Army headquarters to here, many people have died to protect and save you. If you've won, what about them?"

He looked at the young array master and scolded, "Regardless of who you are or why you've come here, this is all wrong."

The array master looked at him, somewhat surprised that he could still stand. The corner of his lips perked into a taunting and jeering smile.

"His Holiness the Pope is truly as strange as rumored, but can you even do anything about this situation?"

Chapter 779 – The Young Demon Lord, the Truth Behind the Mist

The young array master spoke of His Holiness the Pope, but without the slightest tone of respect, rather taunting and jeering.

Whether he was enemy or friend, the existence of this sort of innate tone of voice meant that this young array master's true identity was assuredly quite extraordinary.

Earlier when Chen Changsheng was prepared to leave, he had attempted to send this person into the Garden of Zhou to safeguard their life. In the end, he had been attacked by an extremely faint true essence which shook his Ethereal Palace and disturbed his Yeshi Step. Not only had he failed to send the array master into the Garden of Zhou, he had been placed into enormous danger and had almost died at Nanke's hands.

Now, it was obvious that this had been the array master's work.

Chen Changsheng looked at the black dagger in the array master's hand and felt somewhat cold.

This black dagger probably shared the same origin as the Stainless Sword, both forged from the whisker of a true dragon.

His Stainless Sword was forged from the whisker of the Golden Dragon while the black dagger was presumably forged from the whisker of that Black Frost Dragon.

He just didn't know if it was a harvest from the Demon Lord's expedition into the Garden of Zhou or if it had an even bloodier origin. Regardless, both possibilities made his blood run cold.

It was the same feeling given to him by the conversation and conduct of this father and son.

Yes, the Demon Lord was the young array master's father.

From the moment the young array master said 'father', Chen Changsheng knew who he was.

After the rebellion in Xuelao City two years ago, all the Demon Lord's sons were killed or imprisoned, except one.

That one was the new Demon Lord.

He was also this young array master.

In the entire continent, only he would dare show such contempt towards Chen Changsheng, the Pope of the Human race.

Chen Changsheng was well aware that he could not change much tonight, but he wanted to say a few words so as to clarify a few things.

If this matter had nothing to do with him, he naturally wouldn't

care, but there were quite a few corpses on both sides of the shattered bridge.

These people had come from Mount Song. The mountain path was long and covered in ice, and they had even had to carry a stretcher. The journey had certainly not been easy.

They had finally reached here and the young array master on the stretcher had opened his eyes, but these people were all dead.

If he conjectured into the past, when this young array master had feigned being severely wounded, many people had assuredly died to rescue him from the battlefield.

If Zhou Tong were still alive or Mo Yu had been the one standing there, they would have been able to very quickly analyze and conclude what had occurred. However, Chen Changsheng could memorize all three thousand scriptures of the Daoist Canon backwards but was incapable of seeing through this affair. Thus, he was asking for an explanation in place of the dead. Yet it was just as the young array master said. Even if he did understand, what could he do about it?

Chen Changsheng did not care about this. He asked, "Even if you had spies in the Mount Song Army headquarters coordinating with you, how could you possibly deceive so many people?"

"To ensure that someone found you and also sent me to you was truly very troublesome. There were so many casualties in the Mount Song Army headquarters and the rules you set down were

too complex. It's truly difficult to create such a plan. Even if the Lord Military Advisor personally took part, it would still be very difficult to do."

The young Demon Lord smiled. "Fortunately, I didn't have to worry about these things. Someone was naturally there to handle them for me."

Chen Changsheng looked into his eyes and asked, "Who?"

The young Demon Lord replied, "Besides the Tang clan, weren't there also many people in your Imperial Court that wanted to find the master of the Cinnabar Pill?"

Chen Changsheng's expression turned grave. "What do you want to say?"

"I'm not talking about that trash from just now, I'm talking about your teacher. Even my father and sister who have been on the run for two years were able to find out that you were the master of the Cinnabar Pill, so how could he not think of this possibility? But you were hidden too well. If it weren't for the fact that you were too inexperienced, if he didn't understand you so well, it would truly be difficult to find you."

The young Demon Lord arched his brows, ridicule and sympathy in his voice. "Do you understand now? I simply didn't need to think about deceiving the people in the Mount Song Army headquarters or how to deceive the Tang clan. This was never my plan. It was your teacher Shang Xingzhou's plan."

Whether it was the plans of the Tang clan or the plans of Zhu Ye, Ning Shiwei, the Tianhai clan, and the Prince of Xiang, they were ultimately unable to overcome the plans of Shang Xingzhou. As the undisputed supreme figure of the Great Zhou Dynasty, he stood at the highest place and saw the farthest. He had the most complete grasp of the situation, allowing him to manipulate it as he pleased.

His manipulations were for the sake of killing someone.

The person Shang Xingzhou wanted to kill was naturally Chen Changsheng.

The mountains were cold, the garden in ruins. Chen Changsheng, all alone, lowered his head.

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In a particularly remote cliff in the mountains, the Tang Seventeenth Master gripped his throat and slowly fell backwards, his face showing an expression of fright and disbelief.

The corpses and frozen blood of the dead were scattered all about the cliff. These people had all been killed by him, and now he had become one of their number. Although blood was still flowing through his fingers, there was already little difference between him and the others.

The once-bishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons walked up to the Tang Seventeenth Master, the caution, anxiety, and fear long since replaced by indifference.

"The Second Master's intentions are very simple. You also know that killing the Pope is naturally a great achievement, but also a great sin. Not even our Wenshui Tang clan can bear this sin, so you killed all these people. The problem is that you personally concocted this plan, so did you think that you could continue to live as usual? With your death, no one will connect the death of the Pope to Wenshui City. On the contrary, our Tang clan can even use this matter to make difficulties for the Zhu and Tianhai clan. Perhaps in a few years, the Emotion-Severing Sect in Hanqiu City will have to change its name."

The clerical robes lightly drifted about in the cold winds, just like his white hair and indifferent voice. The Tang Seventeenth Master was already dead and naturally would not speak, but he still very earnestly explained. It felt like after tonight, he would no longer have the chance to speak, and so cherished this chance, even somewhat coveted it.

"This is what it really means to die a worthy death, to die a useful death, or else you would just be trash." The once-bishop looked at the terrifying wound on the Tang Seventeenth Master's neck and indifferently said, "You also never thought, if the Second Master had not let you know, just how would you have been able to find His Holiness?"

After saying this, he looked towards the garden below. Due to the

vast distance, he could not clearly make out what was going on, but he could already see the future. Everyone that had appeared tonight was dead, so nobody would know the truth of just who had caused Pope Chen Changsheng's death.

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"You are lying."

Chen Changsheng suddenly raised his head and said to the young Demon Lord, "You could not have allied with him, but with some other person."

The young Demon Lord was rather surprised that he would so quickly reach this conclusion. "Why? Do you really think that your teacher is some righteous nobleman?"

Chen Changsheng explained, "Of course he's no righteous nobleman. I don't like a lot about his way of doing things, but I know he's not that kind of person. Back then, in order to depose the Tianhai Empress, he could reach a silent understanding with Black Robe, but he would never borrow strength from the demons, let alone work together with a Demon Lord."

The young Demon Lord asked in interest, "Why?"

Chapter 780 – A Simple Story

Starting several hundred years ago, the Demon Military Advisor Black Robe began to plant spies in the human world to the south. Although this plan did not seem to proceed too smoothly on the surface, no one truly knew just how many people had secretly shown loyalty to the Demon race. The story of the Garden of Zhou had long since shattered this confidence.

Black Robe had always been the target of the young Demon Lord's respect and study. To Black Robe, any human could be the target of his bribery, so long as they were favorable to the great undertaking of the Demon race. Even if it was a foe who had slain his father, the grudge could be dissipated with a smile. If it was a very important target, he might even be willing to pay a greater price.

Shang Xingzhou was currently the most important figure in the human world. Logically speaking, it was simply impossible to bribe such a person, as the demons would not be able to provide any benefit. To the demons, however, the chance was still there, as there was clearly a problem between Shang Xingzhou and Chen Changsheng that could be used.

Since there was a chance, there was a possibility, so why did Chen Changsheng so firmly believe that the young Demon Lord was lying?

"Although he holds supreme prestige and power in the human world, it's clear that he's always been wary of you. Could this not be an incentive? As for power or profit, I truly cannot offer him

more, but I can promise to divide the north and south and provide peace to the world. Could he not possibly wish to see such a beautiful future?"

The young Demon Lord was not attempting to convince Chen Changsheng, but to seek through the answer a deeper understanding of Shang Xingzhou, of this master and disciple.

Chen Changsheng replied, "He would not accept your conditions, as he would not be willing, and so he would not believe that you were willing either."

The young Demon Lord's face turned icy as he asked, "Why would he be unwilling?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "There are three thousand Daos, but he only cultivates the Dao of following his heart. I clearly understand what he wants to do, so he could never join hands with you."

The young Demon Lord slightly narrowed his eyes and asked, "Just what does he want then?"

Chen Changsheng pointed at him and his father and said, "He wants to kill all of you and unite this world."

The young Demon Lord fell silent for a very long time, then smiled. "Quite the grand ambition."

His smile was not like the smile of the previous Demon Lord. It did not give off a cool and arrogant feeling, but instead a somewhat shy yet chilling aura.

"I truly can't deceive you. My ally truly was not Shang Xingzhou."

The young Demon Lord laughed and added, "But he really does want to kill you, and this truly is his trap. From the military to the Mount Song Army headquarters, from the Imperial Court to Wenshui, many foolish people, whether voluntarily or on orders, worked together with him, but none of them knew the truth of this plan."

The foolish people he spoke of naturally referred to the now-deceased Zhu Ye, Ning Shiwei, and Tianhai Zhanyi. He was also referring to high-ranking officials in the military, and even that incredibly powerful prince in the Imperial Court. Of course, there were also that deputy general of the Mount Song Army who cherished the soldiers like his children, An Hua, and other such kind-hearted people.

"Some people needed to find the master of the Cinnabar Pill, some people only needed to send a young array master to the Mount Song Army headquarters, and some people were responsible for the place of the young array master on the list. However, no one knew that the young array master was actually a little monster from the Longevity Sect called Chusu who had received an order from Shang Xingzhou and the Tang Second Master to come here and kill you."

The smile vanished from the young Demon Lord's face as he

calmly continued, "And all I did was think of a way to replace that little monster in the middle."

This was the whole truth, but a few matters still remained concealed behind the mist. Since that little monster from the Longevity Sect called Chusu had been dispatched by Shang Xingzhou and the Tang clan to kill Chen Changsheng, it was probably incredibly strong, even terrifying, yet it had been silently replaced...even if he was the Demon Lord, such a feat was still too inconceivable.

Chen Changsheng also noticed that when he spoke about that monster Chusu from the Longevity Sect and the matter of its replacement, both the Demon Lord and Nanke did not show any change of expression. Presumably, in their eyes, this was a very ordinary matter, at least not anything difficult, but why was this?

He thought of a certain possibility, yet he felt it too absurd to continue thinking about...so he just asked.

"Just who is that person?"

It was Chen Changsheng's freedom to ask and an inevitability that the young Demon Lord would not answer.

He asked back to Chen Changsheng, "Shang Xingzhou wants to kill you; do you not feel sad about it?"

Chen Changsheng shook his head. "Master has thought of killing

me many times. I've gotten used to it."

The young Demon Lord sighed, "I didn't expect this generation's Pope to be a blindly filial disciple."

Chen Changsheng did not explain anything, only asked himself a silent question. Though it was easy to understand why his master wanted to borrow this matter to kill him, why had the young Demon Lord taken such a risk in coming?

No matter how close this mountain range was to the snowy plains of the demon realm, this was still within the territory of the Human race. It was naturally a risk for the Demon Lord to appear here. For instance, his father, who had been many times stronger than his son, never left Xuelao City, and the only time he risked sneaking into Mount Han, he almost failed to come back.

The Lord of the Demon race shared a very similar status to the Pope of the Human race. Placing himself at risk to Chen Changsheng was incredibly unwise.

This meant that from the very start, the young Demon Lord's goal had not been Chen Changsheng, or not just Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng looked nearby.

The Demon Lord that had once ruled the northern reaches of the continent for a thousand years was now a figure of blood, his entire body drenched in golden fluid, like the idol worshiped by

some cult.

Nanke silently kneeled beside him, her thoughts a mystery.

The Demon Lord began to take extremely long breaths, as if he was about to fall asleep at any moment, if not for the fact that his eyes were fixed on the starry sky. Of course, this could also be understood as the frequency of his breaths greatly decreasing, about to stop at any moment. At that moment, perhaps he really would die with his eyes open.

The young Demon Lord said, "If it were just to kill you, the little monster Chusu from the Longevity Sect launching a sneak attack from the stretcher would probably have succeeded. But I naturally had a more important reason for taking such great risks in coming south, besides killing Your Holiness.

"Shang Xingzhou and the Tang clan did not know that my father was still alive, but I did."

He looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "I also knew that since my father was alive, he would come and find you."

Chen Changsheng noted, "The Tang clan finding the clues in the Cinnabar Pill essentially pointed the way for your father."

The young Demon Lord affirmed, "Correct, and when he came, I had been waiting here for him for a very long time."

After saying so, he walked over and crouched down next to the Demon Lord, caressing his elderly face.

"From the moment I learned of Shang Xingzhou's plan, I knew that this was the best chance, perhaps the only chance, to kill Sir.

"Of course I was afraid of Sir, and I absolutely did not want to meet Sir. But I needed to kill Sir. Neither the humans in the south nor the Military Advisor could do. I had to do it myself.

"You see Sir, this entire matter was just that simple."

Chapter 781 – [The Finger-Guessing Game Begins](#)

The Demon Lord's eyes had been open the entire time, the life in them gradually fading, dimming.

But at this moment, his eyes suddenly brightened for an instant, perhaps because a shooting star had streaked across the sky just now.

This shooting star came from the star region in the north, perhaps even coming from the Heavenly Sovereign Star in the extreme north. What did this mean?

If the starry sky wants to kill someone, it doesn't need to give some sign in advance. It's just a coincidence, just like how your coming wasn't because of caution or bravery, only because you had no other choice.

The Demon Lord somewhat arduously turned his head and looked at his son. "If you hadn't killed off all your brothers, leaving no one other than yourself to use the Astral Executioner, then with your patient personality, just how could you possibly take such a large risk to personally come and kill me?"

The young Demon Lord sternly said, "Even if they were still alive, how could I be sure that they would meet with Sir? So in the end, it would still be me appearing before Sir."

"This simple story is written very well, and you have also done very well." The Demon Lord looked into his eyes, his voice clear and cold. "But you should be well aware of what the Astral Executioner means. Then have you ever thought of how you will respond if those other races really do break through that wall and come?"

"Father, I have very seriously pondered this problem, but I ultimately concluded that I still had to do this. First of all, if I did not use the Astral Executioner, even if the Military Advisor and Big Aunt took the risk and came themselves, there was still no guarantee that we could kill Sir. The abyss two years ago was witness to one miracle, and I hoped that no other miracle would take place, especially with regards to Sir. Secondly, I really don't care if the other race finds a method to break through the wall using the Astral Executioner, as that will assuredly require many years."

The young Demon Lord continued, "Even if there are a few descenders before that, they will ultimately become my slaves, and when the day finally comes, I believe that I will have already united this continent we live on. Before the army of the other race comes, I will have taken a great army and gone over, so why do I need to worry about this problem?"

As he said this, his expression was very calm, brimming with endless confidence and a determined will.

The Demon Lord looked at his young face and thought of that earlier sight of Chen Changsheng charging from behind those stones. He faintly seemed to understand something, and felt

relieved.

Grandiose ambitions, the business of conquest, and unworldly achievement actually did not need to be personally completed by me. I also can pass it on to my descendants.

The Demon Lord smiled. "Since you are prepared, then it's fine."

The young Demon Lord stooped down and softly kissed him on the forehead, sadly saying, "I hate to see Sir leave."

"No, in truth, I should have left long ago."

The Demon Lord looked into his eyes and continued, "Only tonight, when I saw you prove your prowess again, did I finally understand what my greatest error was. My lofty aspirations were thwarted a thousand years ago and my body long ago became rotted and on the verge of crumbling, yet I still craved power, was unwilling to pass the throne to you young people."

Hot tears spilled from the young Demon Lord's eyes. "Yes, we couldn't wait any longer, so we could only think of a way to invite Sir to leave this world."

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It was very difficult to understand the relationship between this Demon Lord father and son. If he was sorrowful and reluctant, then what of the treachery and callousness of the past few years?

Chen Changsheng found it impossible to understand, but he had understood the rather difficult-to-understand conversation between father and son.

On that night in the Mausoleum of Books, he had been by the Tianhai Divine Empress's side. He had seen and sensed the soul of that monk from the other continent, and he also came from that continent. From a certain viewpoint, he was a condition the exiled imperials had made to the Great Zhou Imperial Court, and he also might be the vanguard for the other race. More importantly, when he was sensing that light in the river of stars, he had seen the enigmatic, distant, and unknown world and faintly sensed a few terrifying Qis.

But just as the young Demon Lord said, that was undoubtedly a matter for many years in the future. Both he and Chen Changsheng had enough time to get stronger and strengthen their respective races, strengthen the entire continent, and thusly have the complete confidence to welcome this unknown challenge.

Firstly, they had to decide who this continent belonged to. In other words, they had to decide just which of them could continue to live.

"I must admit that you truly deserve to be the hope of the exiled imperials, the successor to Yin and Shang. You are much stronger than rumored. Tonight, if you had not attracted all the attention of

my royal father, it truly would have been very difficult for me to find a chance to bring down that execution from the stars."

The young Demon Lord looked at Chen Changsheng, seeming a little embarrassed. "In this sort of situation, I'm naturally a little embarrassed to kill you."

Chen Changsheng said, "I thought that you wanted to kill me this entire time."

The young Demon Lord smiled. "Correct, in the original plan, you should have died a long time ago. You should have died at Lord Hai Di's hands, or else in my younger sister's hands. Even if you had an endless number of tricks to endure past these two, you would have certainly died at the hands of my royal father."

Chen Changsheng noted, "I'm still alive."

The young Demon Lord replied, "This is very good. I can resolve many problems if I bring a living Pope back with me to Xuelao City."

The Human race and the Demon race had been in conflict over the continent for thousands of years, but an important personage on the level of the Pope had never once been captured by either side. If the young Demon Lord really did take Chen Changsheng back to Xuelao City, it would assuredly become the most glorious moment in the history of the Demon race and would assuredly stabilize his place on the throne.

Chen Changsheng only said one thing. "Do you think there's any hope of this?"

The young Demon Lord thought of that scene he had witnessed in the sky upon opening his eyes and arched his brows.

At that moment, Chen Changsheng had fused the two most resolute sword techniques in all of the Human race's sword styles into his Blazing Sword for the sake of killing himself.

No one could stop Chen Changsheng from calmly committing suicide, not unless his royal father were still alive or the Military Advisor and the Demon Commander were present.

"There truly is no hope, so go die then." The young Demon Lord's thoughts moved quickly and he was no slower in making his decision. "In any case, you definitely won't let me eat you, so quickly die then. You also know that I love Xu Yourong, so I've always wanted you to die."

Chen Changsheng said, "I'm somewhat confused as to where your confidence is coming from."

"And what of you? You're heavily wounded and without the strength to fight, yet you can still calmly converse with me. Where is your confidence coming from?"

The young Demon Lord smiled. "You don't need to answer. By coincidence, I just so happen to know the reason."

This is a drinking game in which the two players will simultaneously show a number of fingers while also stating a number. The one that correctly guesses the total number of fingers wins while the loser has to drink.

Chapter 782 – Another Darkness

The young Demon Lord spoke no more. He lowered his body and lightly touched the Demon Lord's forehead while softly reciting something.

He was not speaking in the ordinary Demon language. His words carried a natural sorrow, sounding like a final prayer or blessing.

About to die, his father was.

The brightness in the Demon Lord's eyes had already faded into the gloom, just like that star in the north.

On the other side, Nanke held his hand, but he did not care.

He only calmly gazed at the young Demon Lord, softly patting the back of his hand, and then slowly closed his eyes.

As his eyes closed, his breathing becoming extremely prolonged until there was no gap, and then it stopped.

The deep blue starlight around the wound on his abdomen spread in all directions, transforming his demon body into solid ice.

The cold wind no longer howled, the starlight seemed to retreat into the distance, and the darkness deepened. All was quiet, as if

even time and space had frozen.

The Demon Lord had died.

A generation of legends had come to an end.

A hastily written period could finally be placed on that most magnificent span of history from one thousand years ago.

To the Human race, this period of history had already announced its end with the departure of Han Qing from the pavilion in the Mausoleum of Books and the collapse of the Lingyan Pavilion.

To the Demon race and the entire continent, only tonight had it truly ended.

After some time, the young Demon Lord wiped the tears from his eyes, ceased his sorrow, and stood up.

As he rose, the darkness in the sky seemed to pour into his body, making him seem incomparably large and powerful.

The legacy of countless generations of the strong had finally and totally been passed on to him.

From this moment on, he was the sovereign of the northern reaches of the continent, the master of the Demon race. He no longer needed to be prefixed with 'young' or 'new'.

He was the Demon Lord.

He looked at Chen Changsheng.

"A grand figure like my royal father should not leave the world in such a lonely and ordinary fashion. Fortunately, he has a Pope of the Human race like you to be buried with him, which I suppose is a meager comfort. You can die now. Of course, you'll have to leave those things of yours behind."

Chen Changsheng asked, "What are you referring to?"

After a pause, the Demon Lord replied, "The Garden of Zhou? The Heavenly Tome Monoliths? Although I lost a father tonight, the compensation I will receive won't be too small."

Upon hearing this, Chen Changsheng confirmed that the Demon Lord really did know where his confidence came from, so where did the Demon Lord's confidence come from?

"Don't try to enter the Garden of Zhou." The Demon Lord looked into his eyes and said, "Although I'm not an expert like my royal father that can cut off your connection with space, I can guarantee you that when you try and pass through space, I have countless methods of making you fail."

Chen Changsheng thought this over, then asked, "Black Robe?"

The Demon Lord was somewhat surprised, commenting, "That you could so quickly think of the reason means that your head's still sober."

After the disturbance in the Garden of Zhou, the Li Palace and Mount Li had performed an extensive analysis and confirmed that Black Robe had an extremely deep understanding of the Garden of Zhou, and also possessed some way of affecting the Garden of Zhou's laws. At the time, the Soul Pivot that Nanke had used to control the monster tide had been destroyed and Black Robe's iron plate had been run through by the Heaven Shrouding Sword, but who could guarantee that Black Robe had no more methods?

Chen Changsheng had been heavily injured at the hands of the previous Demon Lord, the little Black Dragon had been thrown far away, the Green Leaf was not here, he had not yet fully comprehended the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, and he did not dare enter the Garden of Zhou. Anyone would think that escaping alive would be an incredibly arduous task for Chen Changsheng, but he himself did not think so.

"If I want to leave right now, it's actually very simple," Chen Changsheng said to the Demon Lord.

The Demon Lord appeared a little surprised as he asked, "Is that so?"

Chen Changsheng explained, "It's fine if I just kill you."

He was very calm as he said this.

The Demon Lord slightly perked his brows. "Do you feel that you have the right to say such words?"

"Why don't I have the right?"

Chen Changsheng continued, "You're older than me, but not much older than me. You're skilled at patiently enduring, but that doesn't mean that your true talent is higher than mine. You are the Demon Lord and I am the Pope. I also have about the same number of treasures and moves as you do. From every aspect, I'm not lacking compared to you, so why can't I fight a battle with you?"

Level of strength, cultivating talent, lucky encounters, status and authority...the young Demon Lord was naturally one of the supreme figures in the world.

But there were two people in this continent that could compete with the young Demon Lord in every aspect.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong.

The Demon Lord quietly stared at him and then suddenly smiled. "That's truly reasonable, but it seems like you've already been heavily injured tonight."

"Yes, but why are you talking so much with me?"

Chen Changsheng continued, "This means that you aren't confident that you can kill me, and this gives me a lot of confidence, the confidence to kill you."

After saying this, he stretched his hand out towards the darkness.

Several stone pearls, the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, silently flew back through the darkness and onto his wrist.

Many of his bones had been broken, but his left arm was still whole. Earlier in the night sky, it was his left hand that he had intended to use his sword with.

At this moment, his left was still tightly gripping his sword, very stable.

Several thousand swords flew back from the lakebed, then scattered and silently hovered around his body, also very stable.

The Demon Lord sensed the awe-inspiring sword intent in the night sky and slightly narrowed his eyes. "Tell me, what would it be like if it were Su Li using these swords?"

This question had nothing to do with the current situation, appearing quite abrupt and sudden.

It was just like the Demon Lord's strike.

The Demon Lord's weapon was not the stone pestle called the Astral Executioner, but a goat horn comb.

To be more precise, it was a powerful magical artifact very similar in appearance to a goat horn comb.

It was called the Heavenly Demon Horn.

The Heavenly Demon Horn, carrying a thick black Qi, descended towards Chen Changsheng.

Blackness filled the snowy valley, obscuring the starry sky. It was like a real darkness, but also like a bottomless abyss, stirring fear in one's heart.

At this sight, Chen Changsheng thought of that darkness he had seen hovering above the snowy plains after leaving the Garden of Zhou, and his expression turned solemn.

The young Demon Lord had patiently endured for many years, concealing all his talent and ability underneath his dissolute and unruly appearance. Tonight, he finally revealed his edge.

After obtaining the complete legacy, his cultivation had become unimaginably powerful!

In the younger generation of the Human race, it was very difficult to find a similarly powerful individual.

Whether it was him or Xu Yourong, they were all clearly a level below. Even if Qiushan Jun were here, he probably wouldn't be able to win.

Perhaps one of the high-rankers on the Proclamation of Liberation like Xiao Zhang or Liang Wangsun might have been able to put up a fight.

He was currently severely injured, the might of his swords one-tenth of what they were at their peak. He could only rely on treasures and external objects to fight, so he was even less of an opponent.

But he had not been lying earlier. He truly wanted to try and kill the Demon Lord.

Because he had other methods, other helpers.

Chapter 783 – The Cry of the Surpassing Bird

The darkness arrived, descending over Chen Changsheng's head.

Countless sword glows shone, traveling to and fro across the darkness as if attempting to cut everything into pieces.

No one knew if the darkness would be cut apart or the sword glows drowned out, and perhaps no one would ever know.

Because without any warning, a mighty and shocking explosion burst through the snowbound ruins of the courtyard!

It was like that star in the star region to the extreme north really had become a shooting star.

It was like that shooting star really had chosen to descend here.

It was falling right here.

The earth quaked, mud and ice were tossed up into the sky, and a green light flitted between them like bolts of lightning.

Two straight and clear sword slashes appeared in the darkness. One horizontal, one vertical, they formed a cross that was just beginning to slowly fade away.

The explosion and the two sword slashes had come from Nanke.

She stood beneath several willow trees, her hands holding the two absurdly long Southern Cross Swords, her eyes fixed on the nearby Demon Lord.

A stream of blood trickled from the corners of her lips, and her small body was covered in the terrifying marks left by corrosive Demon Qi. She had clearly suffered heavy injuries.

The Demon Lord's face was pale and the grisly wound on his abdomen had deepened. A deep green light twinkled within.

He had also suffered significant injuries, and he had also been poisoned by the toxin that was the Peacock Plume.

No one had expected for Nanke to suddenly strike, much less strike at the Demon Lord.

Chen Changsheng had also not expected this. She was not the helper that he had been thinking of.

The Demon Lord stared into Nanke's eyes, his slightly hoarse voice unable to conceal his shock and anger. "Have you gone crazy?"

In the past two years, Nanke had followed her father as they fled.

From this aspect, she and the young Demon Lord were naturally irreconcilable foes. However, the Demon race was one that placed the most emphasis on respect for the strong. Tonight, the previous Demon Lord had died and had recognized the present Demon Lord's status before dying. The situation was set, and as a member of the Demon race, especially as a member of the Imperial clan, she had absolutely no reason to continue opposing the Demon Lord. It must not be forgotten that the Demon Lord was her older brother and that Black Robe was her teacher.

The Demon Lord suppressed his emotions and said to her, "Of all my sisters, I loved you the most. You should also know very well that after the chaos in Xuelao City, all of my sisters are still alive. I didn't even kill them, so I certainly won't harm you, and yet...why do you insist on opposing me?"

Nanke's expression remained wooden, as if she had not been the one to strike just now, but when she spoke, it was akin to the snow falling over Xuelao City, frigid and hard.

"My sisters are still alive, but all the males were killed by you. In your view, this was benevolence and familial love, but in my view, this was pity and contempt. In your eyes, we women are very weak and of no threat to your throne.

"This is what I hate the most."

Nanke spoke to the Demon Lord, but she was also speaking to her father on the ground. She looked at the crystalline corpse left behind by her father and spoke, her voice carrying an extremely complex mixture of emotions. "Father, it turns out that you never

once thought about letting me lead the Divine race."

The space between her eyes was somewhat wide, and the expression in her eyes still seemed rather dull, but she could also show an incredibly complex mixture of emotions. It was because her voice was slightly shaking, her lips slightly trembling, and perhaps also because her Demon heart was also slightly trembling.

"When I was very young, I displayed the blood of the Surpassing Bird, for which you were very happy, bringing me out for every banquet. Later on, when Xu Yourong proved that her talent was better than mine, you stopped liking me. I always felt that Sir had been preparing to raise me into Sir's successor, to have me become the future ruler of the Divine race, but realized that I was too weak to bear this responsibility, and thus was disappointed."

Nanke gazed at the deceased Demon Lord and continued, "I did not want Sir to be disappointed, so I worked hard to make myself stronger. After innumerable trials, I was finally able to take the Military Advisor as my teacher, I entered the Garden of Zhou with the intention of killing of Xu Yourong, I did many things...even when Teacher and the others betrayed Sir, I still did not give up on Sir. I risked the annihilation of my body and soul, suffered unimaginable pain, to rescue Sir from the abyss. I believed that in this way, I could prove my power and loyalty to Sir. In this way, Sir would like me again, value me again, but in the end..."

She raised her head to that dim star in the north, her expression indifferent. "At the very end, Sir was not even willing to glance at me."

Only tonight, only at this very moment, did the young Demon Lord come to know that his younger sister actually thought this way. Although she had the blood of the Surpassing Bird, although she was extremely talented, with a fighting intent that was rarely seen in their snowy domain, although she was actually incredibly intelligent despite her dull appearance...

"In the end, you are still a woman," the Demon Lord harshly said.

He believed that this was one of the reasons his father had never once considered letting Nanke inherit the throne.

"Who said that women can't become the Demon Lord?"

Nanke drew back her gaze, staring once more into the young Demon Lord's eyes.

Her gaze was still rather dull, yet there was also a burning fervor in her eyes, as if something was blazing in their depths.

"Was Tianhai not a woman? Do you dare say that you will do more than she did in the future?"

No person could answer this question.

The Demon Lord also found himself incapable of speaking out against his own beliefs.

Nanke continued, "Since women are also capable, why did Teacher pick you, why did Father pick you?"

The Demon Lord gazed at her silhouette for a very long time, and then smiled.

"Because I'm stronger than you, and my Divine race emphasizes respect for the strong, so Teacher and Royal Father ultimately chose me."

Nanke looked into his eyes, her voice somewhat mechanical. "If I kill you, I will naturally prove that I am stronger than you."

The Demon Lord had a serene expression as he replied, "You will die. Even if you manage to win one or two exchanges by a fluke, just who are you trying to prove yourself to?"

"Although he can no longer see, I still want to try."

The Southern Cross Swords in Nanke's hands tilted forward like two spears piercing through the darkness.

The crazed howling of the wind instantly swallowed up all conversation as green lines of light representing her wings traced through the darkness.

Darkness imbued with a thick Demon Qi and the starlight cleaved out by the Southern Cross Swords incessantly clashed in the valley.

In an extremely brief period of time, the Demon Lord and Nanke exchanged several dozen blows, after which they parted.

The Demon Lord was still standing, golden blood spreading along his chest, but he did not totter, seemingly imbued with a great power.

Nanke lay fallen on the cracked earth of the lakebed, one hand propping her up from the ground. It was already very difficult for her to stand.

The Demon Lord had clearly won, but there was no pride on his face. On the contrary, he appeared very grave.

"So your divine soul actually went through its second awakening...no wonder you could leave the abyss."

Nanke did not reply, only stared at the golden blood flowing out of his body.

In this exchange, she had received heavy injuries, her right wing even showing a tear.

From that tear, grief-stricken weeping could be heard.

Chapter 784 – Born with an Illness

Nanke's eyes somewhat dimmed at the sight of the golden blood on the Demon Lord's body.

This meant that he had already received the true legacy of the Demon Lord.

When she thought of those winds in the abyss that tore at the soul and those maggots that devoured blood and flesh, she became incredibly unwilling, even somewhat despairing.

A cry of pain and fury burst from her lips.

Her cry echoed through the valley as she used the massive Southern Cross Swords to stand her body up.

The sorrowful weeping from the wound in her wing suddenly stopped and her two wings began to flap once more, as if wanting nothing more than to tear the darkness into shreds.

Her eyes were no longer dim, but were now as indifferent as ice or snow. Her wings flapped faster and faster until they were nothing but blurs.

An indescribably powerful Qi emerged from her petite body.

This was a Qi of supreme nobility, but one that disdained to

command living beings, one that danced alone on the other side of a grand mountain range, exuding an ineffable purity and coldness.

This was the Peacock, this was Nanke, this was the Surpassing Bird, this was the most unique existence amongst all birds that would not even lower her head to the Phoenix.

The Demon Lord's expression turned increasingly grave, his voice cold as ice, sharp as a blade, as he shouted, "Do you want to die!"

Nanke stared at him in reply. The green light in the depths of her eyes had long since ignited into a flame of madness.

"Don't forget what the Military Advisor said back then. If you truly allow your divine soul to complete its second awakening, you will be rendered into an imbecile."

The Demon Lord looked at her and urged, "Little Sister, stop being silly, come back with me to Xuelao City. You want to prove that Father was wrong? The reason Father never thought about passing the throne to you was because you are ill! You were born with an illness!"

These words were very harsh, yet they were also somewhat taunting, filled with contempt and pity.

This was the sort of attitude that Nanke was least likely to accept, but she had to accept one fact: the Demon Lord spoke the truth.

When she was very small, the soul of the Peacock within her body awakened and announced to all of Xuelao City that she had a most noble and powerful blood.

No one expected that this also meant that from that day forward, she became ill.

Her talents in comprehension were too strong, so she had awakened the soul of the Peacock too early, far surpassing the speed at which her body matured. The divine soul of the Peacock incessantly grew between her eyes, causing the space between them to grow wider and wider, making her seem more and more dull. If she allowed the Peacock's soul to continue growing and complete its second awakening when she had still not matured, she would truly become an imbecile. There was even a high chance that she might just explode and die.

The Demon Lord's words exposed all truths, gave all explanations, and also severed all her hopes.

Nanke stood on the lakebed, her dress spotted with mud, her hair in disorder. She presented a pitiful sight, looking just like a girl that had come back from gathering pig grass.

Even if she finished the second awakening of her soul that she had begun in the abyss, so what?

Even if she was able to defeat her opponent, so what?

She would die or become an imbecile. In the end, she could never become her father's successor, never become the master of the Demon race.

No one in this world could treat her illness.

Her omnipotent royal father was not able to do it; her omniscient teacher was not able to do it.

The Southern Cross Swords in Nanke's hands gradually drooped down, just like her head and her mind.

It was at this moment that a voice came from behind her.

"I can cure it."

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This voice was bright and clear. Even though its owner had experienced such a long battle, had suffered such heavy wounds, and was quite exhausted, his voice was still so calming and soothing. Perhaps it was because of what he said, or perhaps it was because he had always been a person that was easy to trust.

This was the case whether the listener was a friend, enemy, or

neither.

This was Chen Changsheng's voice.

Long ago in the Garden of Zhou, next to the Plains of the Unsetting Sun, the first words he had said upon seeing Nanke were: "You are ill."

He then said to Nanke, "I can cure it."

After several years, he still said the same words.

Nanke looked at him as if she was seeing that youth standing amongst the reeds, her dimming eyes brightening once more.

At the same time, she also raised the Southern Cross Swords again.

It was often said that change was the driving theme of the world, but also that many things were very difficult to change.

At the time, the condition Chen Changsheng had given was for her to release him and Xu Yourong, and now his condition was similarly clear.

She was the little Princess of the Demon race. She had struck out against the young Demon Lord out of fury and disappointment towards her father and teacher, but this did not mean that she was

willing to betray the Demon race and ally with Chen Changsheng, the Pope of the Human race. It certainly did not mean that she had any good impression of Chen Changsheng or any desire to help him.

Chen Changsheng's words were to make it feasible.

He could cure her, so she now had a very good reason to help him.

But Nanke's way of thinking was even more extreme than Chen Changsheng's.

She looked at Chen Changsheng and pointed with a sword at the Demon Lord. "Let's work together and kill him."

It was very blunt and icy, carrying with it an aura of inelegance, just like Nanke.

"My wounds are too heavy. The probability is small," Chen Changsheng said.

As if wanting to prove his words, the countless swords quietly floating in the night sky buzzed.

This meant that his spiritual sense was on the verge of losing its perfect control of these swords.

Nanke slightly raised her brows and prepared to reply. Suddenly, her expression subtly shifted and she gazed past the mountains into the distance.

In the distance was the north.

To the north of the snowy mountains, a thousand li away, a demon cloaked in a black robe appeared in front of a mountain.

The snowy plain drenched in starlight seemed abnormally white. Logically speaking, it should have made this demon appear all the more striking.

But not even the eyes of the Great Zhou Army's best Red Falcon would be able to realize his existence.

He was like a most unremarkable black stone on the snowy plains.

Because he was the greatest master of concealment in the continent, the Demon Military Advisor Black Robe.

Black Robe's gaze fell on a shabby metal plate in front of him.

Starlight fell upon the metal plate as it did in the past, as if nothing had changed. In reality, however, tonight's starlight was completely different from the starlight of the past thousand years.

The brightest star in the night sky of the north had become abnormally dim, and it was unknown when it would regain its shine.

A deep sigh drifted out of the black robe, filled with an incredibly complex mixture of emotions.

He had assisted the Demon Lord for almost a thousand years, so how could he truly act indifferent towards his passing?

If he truly held no sentiment, why was that jade-like finger on the metal plate trembling?

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When Black Robe's finger fell on the metal plate, both Nanke and Chen Changsheng felt an enormous danger.

Nanke felt it because of the connection between teacher and student while Chen Changsheng felt it because of the Fated Star belonging to the legitimate line of the Orthodoxy.

Without the slightest hesitation, Chen Changsheng called out, "Kui, north, Shen, forty-eight incline."

Nanke flapped her wings and swiftly flew into the night sky.

Chapter 785 – The Peacock Flies Southeast

Chen Changsheng called constellations and coordinates. More precisely, he indicated a position of the Yeshi Step.

The Yeshi Step was the innate supreme skill of the Demon race's Yeshi clan. The Demon Imperial clan could also learn it, but in the past several decades, only Nanke had gained a complete grasp of it. Chen Changsheng had only managed to learn this movement technique by relying on his understanding of the Daoist Canon, indescribably monotonous calculations, and his awareness of the star charts on the Heavenly Tome Monoliths.

After calling out these coordinates, Chen Changsheng shook his right sleeve. The swords howled through the air and blocked the Heavenly Demon Horn that had been stealthily making its way through the darkness. He stepped on a star position and his body vanished. He left the ground, taking step after step into the night sky, making his way to higher and higher altitudes.

The many swords followed him, gradually returning to the sheath along the way.

This was an incredibly beautiful sight, but it was rather meaningless. In a little while when his true essence ran out, he would drop from the sky and be in great danger, and this was not even considering the fact that the thick darkness accompanying the Heavenly Demon Horn was closely pursuing him.

Chen Changsheng did this because he knew that Nanke had

understood his intentions.

Just as expected, when he appeared high above the mountain range amongst the frigid winds, Nanke was already there.

She had left two beautiful trails of green light behind her in the sky.

But this was still not enough to leave, as the darkness brought by the Heavenly Demon Horn was gradually engulfing the entire mountain range.

But it was also because in the distant north, Black Robe's finger began to beat on the metal plate like it was a drum.

The icy winds blew against Chen Changsheng's face. He sensed something and tightened the grip on his sword.

Nanke's eyelashes trembled, but her eyes remained indifferent. As she gazed at the deepening darkness, she sensed the ripples of Qi within and understood something.

Although Chen Changsheng was so heavily wounded that even allying with Nanke would not necessarily result in the young Demon Lord's defeat, it logically shouldn't have been difficult to escape.

Yet unexpectedly, this darkness contained several hundred Essence Qi Locks.

The methods that the demons had used to besiege Su Li several years ago were being used tonight by Black Robe to deal with the pair.

Those Qi Locks probably had nothing to do with the Heavenly Demon Horn. Instead, they had probably been spread around by the young Demon Lord through some other method with Black Robe responsible for activating them from the distance.

How could they break through these Essence Qi Locks? Did the Pope of the Human race truly have to be buried together with the Demon Lord?

"Can you really cure it?"

Nanke's voice sounded particularly somber in the frigid winds.

Chen Changsheng saw the resolve in her eyes and understood what she intended to do, but he could not bring himself to answer her.

If he had enough time, he was confident that he could cure Nanke, especially if he had Xu Yourong's help.

But the situation was too dangerous and everyone knew that Black Robe was most skilled at mental attacks. If Nanke completed the second awakening of her soul right now, it was highly likely that her teacher would deal her a serious blow from a thousand li

away with disastrous results.

Chen Changsheng was not confident.

Even though she did not hear his answer, Nanke's Qi continued to rise.

Perhaps her question had just been to comfort herself.

The indifference in her eyes had completely transformed into a fervor that bordered on self-destruction.

And then, it began to blaze.

A bright Peacock appeared in the night sky, exuding a green light in all directions.

Its two wings were about a hundred zhang wide. When they flapped, the clouds scattered and the stars fell into disarray while mountains crumbled below!

The several hundred Essence Qi Locks concealed in the darkness were forced to reveal themselves with the appearance of the Peacock's true body.

The Essence Qi Locks in the part of the sky closest to the human lands numbered the fewest and were rather sparsely spread.

The Peacock flew in that direction, crashing through many Essence Qi Locks in its path, its feathers snapping and its Qi raging!

Over there was the southeast.

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As he watched the specks of light flicker on the metal plate, Black Robe gave another deep sigh.

It was plain to see that this sigh was for his only female disciple.

Suddenly, the southeast corner of the plate became extremely bright, the rays of light illuminating Black Robe's face.

This was a face that could be described as perfect, but it was somewhat pale from not seeing the sun. It was also suffused with a faint green, the aura of death.

Black Robe raised his head towards the night sky to the south. He sensed something and the corners of his lips drooped downward. When the corners of one's lips drooped, it usually meant unhappiness, an ill mood, but on his face, this expression carried a different meaning, a thick sense of scorn.

A cling came from the metal plate.

The Essence Qi Locks in the distant night sky silently scattered, killing countless startled birds.

At the very front of that green light, one could clearly see that Peacock vanish.

Two black dots fell towards the distant ground, perhaps alive or perhaps dead.

At almost the same time, the darkness obscured the starlight and the young Demon Lord used some mysterious method to appear a thousand li away on the snowy plain. He did not look at Black Robe, nor did he look at where Nanke and Chen Changsheng had fallen. Instead, he looked towards the mountain range he had come from, appearing very interested, even somewhat excited.

Black Robe was also quietly looking at that mountain range.

The wind blew up a corner of his hood, revealing half of his face, from which one could see a rather complex expression.

It was like he was looking at his hometown.

Perhaps it was because an old friend was there.

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When the young Demon Lord stabbed the stone pestle into his father's abdomen and that mysterious pillar of light crossed the river of stars and descended on the snowy mountains, many places in the continent responded. The Li Palace, the Dew Platform, Holy Maiden Peak, White Emperor City, and even the distant Great Western Continent and the dragon islands in the Southern Sea knew that some major event had taken place. And all the star observation platforms in the world bore witness to the phenomenon of the Heavenly Sovereign Star in the northern star region suddenly dimming.

Based on the calculated result, the troops of the Great Zhou Army spread out along the frontlines of Mount Han were ordered to investigate. Gaoyang Village, which should have had the fastest response, had fallen into chaos after a quick succession of incidents, thus no one had any mind to discover what was happening on the other side of the mountains.

Bie Yanghong appeared on the other side of the mountains.

Two years had gone by. He had suffered severe injuries in the coup of the Mausoleum of Books and had appeared on the verge of death, but he was still alive, his wounds completely healed and his cultivation even higher than before, even seeming on the verge of becoming head of the current Storms of the Eight Directions.

Even he had somewhat exhausted himself to cross several thousand li in a single night, and the small red flower tied to his pinkie appeared rather weary.

Several years ago when the Demon Lord entered Mount Han to kill Chen Changsheng and the Elder of Heavenly Secrets warned the world, Bie Yanghong had not needed very long to travel from Jiangnan to Mount Han. In the speedy travel over long distances, even White Emperor City's Jin Yulu was far inferior to him, yet tonight, he was not the first person to arrive.

The first to arrive was a scholar.

Bie Yanghong had studied in Xiling's famous Ten Thousand Years Pavilion for many years and had a scholarly air about him, but not even he would refer to himself as a scholar in front of this person.

The Demon Lord often dressed as a scholar when traveling the world, but even he would find it embarrassing to refer to himself as a scholar in front of this person.

This person had read far too many books.

He had read books in his hometown, in Luoyang, in the capital, in the Li Palace, in the Imperial Palace, in the Mausoleum of Books, on the snowy plains, [after being returned from dreams by the call of horns, and intoxicated under the light of a candle](#). Before Gou Hanshi, Chen Changsheng and Yu Ren, only he had ever read all three thousand scriptures of the Daoist Canon.

Later on, he had begun to teach. He had taught for several decades in Star Seizer Academy, raising so many renowned generals that the Demon Lord's hair went white from stress.

He was the most famous scholar of the past thousand years, Wang Zhice.

'After being returned from dreams by the call of horns' and 'intoxicated under the light of a candle' are both modified lines from a poem by Xin Qiji, a general and poet of the Southern Song Dynasty. In the poem, these two lines are reversed and go, 'Intoxicated and viewing the sword by candle light, returned from dreams to camp by the call of horns', the meaning being that the author is viewing a sword in his dreams, but is awakened back to his camp on the battlefield by the blaring of horns.

Chapter 786 – An Old Friend Comes In the Snow

Bie Yanghong had never met Wang Zhice. However, many years ago, he had spent a night in the Lingyan Pavilion and carefully scrutinized that portrait under the light of the White Sun Flame for a very long time. Perhaps it was also because Wang Zhice could only be Wang Zhice. Whatever the reason, when he saw the scholar, he recognized him.

Three years ago, Chen Changsheng had met Wang Zhice in Mount Han, but for various reasons, he had not told many people. In reality, however, many people knew that Wang Zhice was still alive. It was just that he was wandering the world and incredibly difficult to track down. Of course, those people were all important people like Bie Yanghong.

Although they were all important personages of the present world, they would still feel shocked and honored to personally lay eyes on Wang Zhice, and Bie Yanghong was no exception.

His voice trembled as he asked, "Lord Wang?"

Wang Zhice did not reply.

Bie Yanghong calmed his mind and walked to the nearby lakeshore. Pointing at the traces of battle, he voiced his analysis and reenactment of the battle.

Wang Zhice still said nothing, only calmly gazed at a place amongst the snowy pines, seemingly lost in thought.

Bie Yanghong recalled that rumor and could not help but ask, "Your Excellency, the demons advance south so wantonly; does Your Excellency still not intend to act?"

There was a small mound in the forest, with a little snow still on top of it. It appeared very lonely and desolate.

The Demon Lord had died there and was still within.

Wang Zhice knew, but he was not prepared to tell anyone, not prepared to do anything to the remains of his old friend.

It was just like that person buried beneath the Orthodox Academy.

[Entrust his body to become one with the mountain.](#)

Those who should pass away had to pass away eventually.

Regardless of how much you struggle, or if you construct a mausoleum for yourself that stretches to the sky, you will still become an unremarkable mound in the world of mortals.

The Demon Lord was finally dead.

His Majesty and Big Brother had already died many years ago.

Wang Zhice thought of many matters from the past, many old friends, and he was filled with great sorrow.

He shook his head and prepared to leave.

Bie Yanghong gazed at his melancholy figure and urged, "His Majesty Taizong treated you poorly, but the common people love and respect you. Can Your Excellency bear to give them up?"

Of the Storms of the Eight Directions, Wang Zhice liked Bie Yanghong the most. He only felt that his choice of partner was truly disastrous. When he heard this person's persuasions, he smiled and thought to himself that he should advise Bie Yanghong to divorce his wife instead, but when the words left his mouth, they turned into a sigh.

Just what right did he have to advise others in this aspect?

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In the snowy plain a thousand li away, the river of stars in the night gradually revealed its true appearance.

Black Robe gazed at the snowy mountains as if he had seen his

old friend.

The wind stirred, cold and bleak, ruffling his hood and revealing a corner of his face.

His skin was suffused with the sickly faint green of death, yet it could not hide its absolute beauty. Upon seeing it, one could not help but speculate as to just how peerless and magnificent it was all those years ago.

The Demon Lord was also looking towards the mountains, a wildfire blazing within his serene eyes. He seemed particularly interested, even excited.

"The visitor really is Wang Zhice? It's truly a pity that We could not see such a legendary figure."

The Demon Lord's voice was slightly hoarse as he said, "If he pursues, then it's fine. We will certainly take a good look before tearing him limb from limb."

It could be said without question that Wang Zhice was the most terrifying foe the Demon race had encountered in all its history.

The history books of Xuelao City were filled with records concerning him.

In the rankings of the Demon race's most hated foes, he was ranked even higher than Emperor Taizong.

Starting from a thousand years ago and persisting to the present, several centuries since the last news concerning Wang Zhice, the demons still hoped that Wang Zhice was still alive. They did not want that man to die of old age, as only if he was alive could he see humanity's defeat, could they tear his body limb from limb.

From a certain perspective, the Demon Lord's words should have been expected. The problem was that if Wang Zhice really did pursue, just what sort of confidence did just he and Black Robe alone have to defeat Wang Zhice, prevent him from escaping, and then tear his body into pieces?

A heavy boom rose as the snowy plain trembled.

A Mountain-toppling Fiend several dozen zhang high slowly walked out as if it had been residing in the void this entire time.

Nestled in the Mountain-toppling Fiend's massive coiled horns sat a thin and cross-legged figure. This figure was covered all over in armor that was patterned with sunflowers formed from golden threads, and studded with green gems that simultaneously gave off a gorgeous yet rotten feeling. None of this, however, could snatch away any of the cold light in this figure's eyes.

She was the strongest figure of the Demon Army: the Demon Commander.

She had been hiding in this snowy plain the entire time.

Ten-some mountainous black figures followed behind her, all of them Demon Generals.

The forces the demons had arranged tonight were truly enough to kill any expert in the world, even a legendary one. Several years ago, outside Xuelao City, Su Li was almost ground to death when confronting a similar array of forces. Fortunately, Chen Changsheng had delivered a sword across ten thousand li, allowing him to eventually escape, but he had still suffered horrendous injuries.

A sigh filled with regret oozed out of the Demon Commander's armor.

The Demon Generals behind her felt the same.

The starlight illuminated Black Robe's lower jaw, somewhat dispersing the sickly green, leaving behind only the beautiful pale white.

"Although that person still lives, he is already dead," Black Robe said, his eyes still fixed on the mountains.

His voice was utterly devoid of emotion, but all the demons present could hear the thick scorn in it, and even a sliver of extremely deep loathing.

In the center of the Demon Commander's rust-covered armor

was a somewhat shabby round breast protector, embedded into the armor with the purest of crystal.

She extended a fur-covered hand and extracted an item wrapped in cloth from within the breast protector.

It was very obvious that she was filled with nothing but loathing for the item wrapped in the cloth. She was not willing to keep the object in her hand for long and threw it straight to the ground.

The bundle thumped against the snow, and then it unleashed a string of almost pathetic yet also piercing curses.

"It truly does deserve to be called the ancestral hall of the southern religion with deep resources. Even after being killed twice by Su Li, the Longevity Sect was still able to conceal such an insidious and powerful move."

The Demon Commander's voice was sharp and unpleasant. "But its Dao was somewhat defective. I invited the Shadow Talisman Master of the Council of Elders to remodel it somewhat, so it should be much easier to use now."

Even after being thrown from several dozen zhang high down onto the cold snow, the object within did not appear injured. It continuously struggled, looking a little like some small beast.

The Demon Lord's gaze fell on the item, a look of disgust appearing on his face. Upon hearing about the Shadow Talisman

Master of the Council of Elders, he seemed a little fearful. In his eyes, this item was born a monster, and now that it had been remodeled, it was now soaked through and through in a bloody and bizarre scent.

"Return to the south and complete your task. If Chen Changsheng is still alive, remember to kill him a few more times."

A hemp rope shining with a golden light fell in the Demon Lord's palm and the bundle on the snow unwrapped.

A black silhouette leapt out and instantly lunged several dozen zhang away.

Under the starlight, one could see that it was a small human, but its body was covered in extremely dark fur. It was somewhat similar to the appearance demi-humans took when not completely transformed. However, when it stared at something, a flash of madness would flit across its sluggish eyes as if it were some beast that suffered endless torment.

A famous line from the last of the 'Three Dirges' by Tao Yuanming, a poet who lived during China's Six Dynasties period. The full line is, 'what else is there to say of the dead, entrust the body to become one with the mountain.'

Chapter 787 – After Leaving

The monster stared at the demons, revealing its sharp teeth. A low growl came from its mouth, apparently intending to warn and threaten.

But in the end, it only feigned a few bites at the air.

It confirmed that these demons were far stronger than it. It had no chance.

With two screeches of pain and hatred, the monster dug into the snow, heading south.

It was obvious that this monster from the Longevity Sect was much weaker than the demon experts present, but for some reason, whether it was the Demon Lord or the Demon Commander, they all reviled yet were also wary of this monster. Only after they were sure that the monster was very far away did they truly relax.

The Demon Lord raised his head towards the head of the Mountain-toppling Fiend and asked, "What of Hai Di?"

If it were his father still reigning, a question would never have been asked this way, as the only existences that should require the Demon Lord to raise their head were the souls of the deceased. Perhaps because the young Demon Lord had no awareness of this or because the Demon Commander intended to make him aware of this, the Demon Commander remained on the head of the

Mountain-toppling Fiend, not coming down.

"He died."

"Very good."

The Demon Lord revealed an intimidating smile. "The person Big Brother met on the first night after he entered Xuelao City was him. Did he think We did not know?"

Black Robe indifferently said, "Lord Hai Di still hoped to deceive Your Majesty's eyes."

"When he received Su Li's attack outside Xuelao City, he only lost an arm. Now he's even stronger while Father was heavily injured. Even if the Heavenly Tome Monolith recognized its master, how could he possibly be sent flying into a mountain with one blow? He wanted to take advantage of the chaos to escape, wanted to act out another play? We certainly have no interest in continuing this play."

After saying these scornful words, the Demon Lord took Black Robe's hand and assisted him as they walked north, appearing particularly respectful.

The Demon Commander, seated amongst the horns of the Mountain-toppling Fiend, watched this lord and minister on the snowy plains and let out an extremely soft and mysterious laugh.

Her laugh was very unpleasant, sounding like a broken gong.

The laughter suddenly stopped as she asked the distant Black Robe, "And Princess Nanke?"

"Should be dead."

Black Robe's voice was still flat, but it was different from how he spoke of Wang Zhice, no ridicule or loathing concealed within.

His only successor had died, yet there were no ripples of emotion in his voice, perhaps because there had never been any affection.

"And Chen Changsheng?"

"Should be alive."

The one to answer this question was the young Demon Lord.

The Demon Commander was rather surprised to hear this answer.

The trap the demons had laid tonight could be described as perfect. For this, they had even been willing to use a war to cover and serve as a backdrop to their movements. His Majesty who had escaped the abyss and made all the authoritative nobles in Xuelao City feel like they had swords to their backs was naturally their number one target, but they certainly would not let the Pope of the

Human race escape.

At present, His Majesty was dead, Princess Nanke was also probably dead, yet Chen Changsheng was alive. Why?

The young Demon Lord recalled the powerful Qi exuded by Nanke as she awakened her soul for the second time and his eyes narrowed. "A few accidents occurred."

Presumably that little monster will bring the world a few more accidents when it returns to the south, he silently thought.

Black Robe knew what he was thinking and said, "That little monster is not necessarily capable of killing Chen Changsheng."

The Demon Commander harshly reproved, "Is it that it can't, or is it that you don't want it to kill Chen Changsheng?"

"Chen Changsheng is extremely talented in cultivation, has a deep understanding of the path of the sword, and has an endless stream of strategies. Although that little monster is incredibly evil, it will still be very difficult for it to kill Chen Changsheng."

The Demon Lord's original intention with these words was to prevent Black Robe and the Demon Commander from quarreling, but Chen Changsheng's performance in that battle had truly left too deep an impression on him. It had also left him very puzzled. Chen Changsheng did not seem like a Pope, but more like an assassin that walked in the night.

Black Robe ignored the Demon Commander's accusing question and explained, "Although Chen Changsheng is a legitimate successor to the Orthodoxy, he did not succeed Yin or Shang, but Su Li."

With the Demon Lord's status, he naturally knew that Su Li had once been an assassin.

After hearing this, he seemed enlightened and said no more.

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Su Li had already left this world, but his spirit still remained.

The meaning of these words was not to say that he was dead, that chrysanthemums were piled high outside Mount Li's Sword Hall while mourners wailed about how they could still vividly remember his voice and face.

What was meant here was that though he had taken the Holy Maiden to visit the distant other continent, his sword was still showing its use in the world.

He had left his sword in those letters, with the last letter being torn open by Chen Changsheng in front of the Demon Lord.

At the same time, his sword was also gripped in Chen Changsheng's hand.

Of course, his sword had always been gripped in the hands of the disciples of Mount Li and had never once been let go.

Two years ago, the Demon Army had abruptly launched an offensive to the south, swiftly conquering vast tracts of fertile land and fighting their way to the base of Mount Han. It was only at this point that people remembered that humiliating period of history from one thousand years ago, remembered that the Human race had once faced the calamity of extinction.

Besides the Great Zhou Army, all the sects and great schools of the world participated in this monumental war. The teachers and students of the Six Ivies proceeded in an unbroken stream to the frontlines while countless southern cultivators, from South Stream Temple to Scholartree Manor, from the Qiushan clan to the Blazing Sun Sect, traveled to the distant north and began to fight.

Previously, the sects and noble clans of the south had taken only suggestions, not orders. After the confluence of the north and south, this was no longer the case. More cultivating experts took part in the battle, more array masters assisted in realizing strategies, and they all worked in perfect concert. The fighting power of the human armies had experienced an obvious improvement. Besides the morale-raising power of the mysterious Cinnabar Pill, the Human race had been able to achieve a parity of power with the Demon race on the plains, and even engage in the

occasional forceful counterattack, due to these changes brought about by the confluence of the north and south.

However, the Mount Li Sword Sect acted the same as it had in the past. Three elders of the Sword Hall brought second generation disciples Gou Hanshi, Guan Feibai, and Liang Banhu, and many more third generation disciples, to the strategic areas of Snowhold Pass and Blue Pass to assist the human armies in battle. However, they rarely listened to orders from the army headquarters, spending the majority of time minding their own business.

This way of doing things naturally drew a great deal of criticism, but the Longevity Sect was currently incapable of affecting Mount Li's decisions. Holy Maiden Peak, on the other hand, had been very muted over the past two years, and South Stream Temple and Mount Li had always had a close relationship regardless, so it naturally would not give orders to Mount Li. As for the Imperial Court...

Ever since Su Li, the disciples of Mount Li only had eyes for swords, so such a thing as the Imperial Court did not exist.

No matter how much talk there was, no one would dare order the Mount Li Sword Sect around. Other than the reasons stated above, the primary reason was that nobody had anything to say.

The places where the Mount Li Sword Sect stood guard, Snowhold Pass and Blue Pass, were places on which the demons had placed the greatest pressure. The disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect had engaged in extremely bitter close-quarters combat on the battlefield, unwilling to be outdone by others. In less than

two years, ten-some third generation disciples had died in battle, Gou Hanshi and Liang Banhu were severely injured, and one upper level Star Condensation elder of the Sword Hall had delayed the demon wolf cavalry for two whole hours in order to cover the retreat of Black Mountain Army's black-armored cavalry before finally dying a heroic death.

Who could say anything about such a Mount Li Sword Sect?

Other than Star Seizer Academy, which was accustomed to having its blood spilled, no other school or sect could match up to the sacrifices made by the Mount Li Sword Sect.

In stark contrast to this was the Orthodox Academy.

Chapter 788 – A Military Achievement

Dropping from the Heavens

Everyone knew the reason for the stark contrast in sacrifice: the students of the Orthodox Academy had obtained the protection of both the Imperial Court and the Li Palace. The most obvious example was that the Orthodox Academy had started taking in students three years ago and now consisted of more than three hundred teachers and students, yet only a few students were present on the frontlines, and they were all assigned to secretarial duties.

But nobody criticized the Orthodox Academy.

This was because everyone understood the malice concealed behind the Imperial Court's arrangements, and they also understood why the Li Palace would be so nervous.

More importantly, besides those students performing secretarial tasks, the Orthodox Academy had another person on the frontlines.

Although that person had probably forgotten his identity, Su Moyu, who was overseeing the Orthodox Academy in the capital, would not forget, nor would the priests of the Li Palace in charge of related matters, especially those from the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education. He was a person of the Orthodox Academy, and a very important person.

Wofu Zhexiu was the strongest of the Wolf tribe's younger

generation, and he was also the Vice Superintendent of the Orthodox Academy.

After Zhou Tong died, Zhexiu left the capital and came to the frontlines to do battle with the demons, returning to the lifestyle he was once most used to.

It was unknown whether he still had any memories of his life in the capital and the Orthodox Academy, but he clearly had no awareness that he was the Vice Superintendent of the Orthodox Academy. In this period of nearly two years, he had never once met with the students sent to the frontlines from the Orthodox Academy, much less instructed them in anything. He also had not accepted the command from the army to become the supervising general of Blue Pass, and when the Vice Principal of Star Seizer Academy, communicating through the now-pardoned Divine General Xue He, had wanted to express his goodwill by having Zhexiu train the elite black-armored light cavalry of Black Mountain Army, he had also refused. Instead, he had returned to his original profession in the army.

Scout, spy, ambusher, assassin...there were many names, but they all had essentially the same meaning.

Zhexiu was still living and fighting in his own way.

His life had originally consisted of countless battles strung together.

As for his way, it was naturally fighting alone.

Just like in years past, everyone felt that this sort of method of fighting was too primitive, barbaric, bloody, and low-class. It was very difficult to last on the snowy plains for too long, so they felt like they would hear news of his death at any time, yet he stubbornly continued to survive while also harvesting the fruits of battle.

In these two years, the military achievements he had attained all by himself were equal to the total military achievements of some sects or schools.

The officers and soldiers of the Black Mountain Army headquarters and Blue Pass once more thought of that saying that had been passed around for many years.

Zhexiu was a man who was born for military achievements.

And now, his military achievements were the Orthodox Academy's military achievements.

In this sort of situation, who could criticize the Orthodox Academy?

In the ten-some forts in the north, there was probably only one person in the past few years that could compare with Zhexiu in military achievements.

Interestingly, Zhexiu was famous while that person was

unknown.

That person had once worked as a civil official in the headquarters of the Northern Expeditionary Army, but for some reason had been demoted to Seven Li Xi, becoming an ordinary officer in the roaming cavalry. Perhaps because he was skilled in strategy, had excessive strength, or simply had astonishing luck, in his period at Seven Li Xi, he had led the roaming cavalry along with a superior officer surnamed Chen in creating countless miracles, achieving countless victories, and accumulating an almost obscene amount of military merit.

However, perhaps because he was too conceited, bullied around his subordinates, or simply had a repulsive character, or maybe because he was from the south and not a person of Zhou, this officer had an awful relationship with other people in the camp. He would butt heads with his superiors and defy military law. The achievements that he had strenuously accumulated were used to lighten his punishments and were never once cleanly registered, so he was unable to gain as resounding a reputation as Zhexiu.

Logically speaking, with this person's abilities and the speed at which he accumulated merit, as long as he was just a little intelligent, he would assuredly have become a promising and nurtured member of the Northern Expeditionary Army, with a chance of even becoming the Great Zhou Army's youngest Divine General in a few years. However, the important officers in the army headquarters never gave him this sort of opportunity. Later, people finally understood what this disregard signified.

This intentional suppression of the young officer garnered much

discontent and accusations of injustice in the camp at Seven Li Xi. After a battle three months ago, these emotions finally exploded. After a night of drinking, cavalry rendered the most bustling street of Seven Li Xi into ruins.

What happened next was very simple: the young officer was expelled from the roaming cavalry by an order straight from the Ministry of the Army in the capital, even expelled from the Northern Expeditionary Army, and was transferred to an extremely remote location.

This place was called Sloping Cliff and was located in the foothills southeast of Mount Han. This was not a critical stronghold that received the brunt of the demon assault, nor did it guard a crucial thoroughfare used to transport supplies. It was just a little-remembered and remote horse farm.

This place yielded nothing other than the frost-colored grass growing along the cliffs. It was an incredibly desolate place. Not even the migratory birds returning north from the south would stop here. The only reason there was a horse farm here was that the frost-colored grass was the favorite food of Dragonhorses.

Dragonhorses were the most important mounts of the Great Zhou Army. Setting up a horse farm just to satisfy their desires could be considered preferential treatment, but to the people banished here, such a thing was completely out of the question.

The young officer became yet another unlucky person that was banished to Sloping Cliff in the last several hundred years.

The officers and soldiers of Sloping Cliff knew of his history and achievements, and naturally felt a great deal of sympathy, yet none of them ever considered why such an outstanding young officer encountered such suppression from his superiors, a suppression that even seemed to come straight from the Ministry of the Army in the capital. They also did not consider that although this remote horse farm was far from the battlefield, making it impossible to gain any more military achievements, one also did not need to worry about being killed by demon experts here.

In brief, all these seemingly unreasonable matters inevitably had their reasons, but no one knew of them at the time.

As one of those involved, the officer naturally knew the reason, but he did not say anything. But perhaps it was for these reasons that in his two months at Sloping Cliff, his mood was rather downcast, his body smelling of alcohol every day.

Drowning one's sorrows in alcohol might not meet with success, but it fortunately did not interfere with his official business. The greatest effect on him was just that he slept rather heavily. Every night, he would sleep until sunrise, a state of affairs which lasted until one night, when two extremely heavy thumps came from the back of the camp...

He propped up his body and angrily yelled out his window, "Can't a person get some sleep?"

No one answered his question, and he fell asleep once more. Yet

it was not too long before someone came to rouse him again.

Accompanied by his subordinates, he came to where the horse farm met the cliffs. Upon seeing the sight before him, he couldn't help but suck in his breath.

The slope was scored with trails left by tumbling rocks and dust was still in the air. A man lay on the ground, but the officer could not tell whether he was dead or alive. A girl of twelve or thirteen years of age sat to the side with her arms wrapped around her legs, her clothes in tatters, her body covered in dirt, and a dull-witted expression on her face.

Chapter 789 – Meeting at the Mountain of the Blind

The young officer walked to the fallen body of the man.

The man's face was covered in blood, but the officer could still tell that he was very young.

The officer smelled a very light and indescribable scent, and could not help but frown. He squatted at the man's side and began to examine his injuries. He discovered that the man was covered all over in wounds, and his right arm was broken into ten-some segments.

At the sight of these heavy injuries, his frown deepened. He looked up and saw that two clear trails had been drawn through the rocks and frost grass of the cliff face. It was easy to conclude that this pair had dropped down from high up.

The young officer knew that higher up on the cliff was a road that had once been used by an army to reach the bustling towns and cities on the eastern side of Mount Han. Though it had been abandoned for many years, it was still traversable, with bandits or smugglers occasionally risking the journey. Could this person have fallen down from there? After falling from such high elevation, it was no wonder that he had suffered such severe injuries. That he had not died on the spot could already be considered quite lucky.

Taking the clear water and tools from his subordinate, the young officer began to clean and treat the unconscious young man's

wounds, ensuring that the situation would not worsen for the moment. After finishing this, he stood up, washed his hands, and walked over to the small girl.

He once more squatted down and then said to the girl, "Hello."

The girl did not reply. She hugged her knees, her dull gaze resting on the injured young man. Her complexion was pale and she seemed extremely delicate.

The young officer put a hand in front of her eyes and snapped his fingers, after which he asked, "What sort of people are you two?"

The girl shifted backwards as if afraid.

The officer saw the hint of terror flickering in her eyes and could not help but think of that pitiful pair of eyes many years ago in that Unicorn cave.

"We've asked many questions, but this little girl never once responded. If she's not mute, then she's probably deaf."

The subordinate thought, then added, "Of course, she could also be scared out of her wits."

"If you knew that she might be scared, why did you keep asking questions?"

The young officer crossly rebuked as he rose and made his way back to the camp.

At this moment, a rather feeble yet clear voice rose from behind him.

"Hungry."

The young officer turned around.

The girl was vacantly staring at him.

"I want to eat meat."

The young officer was stupefied for a few moments, and then smiled, his fingers once more snapping in the chilly mountain winds.

"It's fine as long as you can speak and know how to ask for things."

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In the north, autumn and winter were not very different. The horse farm at Sloping Cliff, located deep in the mountains, was relatively warm, but after a night of being buffeted by the winds of the north, it chilled. Fortunately, the kang in the camp had long since been heated, so no soldiers were frozen to death. On the contrary, quite a few of them were scalded.

"They're all so dumb, it's no wonder they were forced here to raise horses."

The young officer gave his subordinates a good scolding before driving them out, after which he turned to a corner of his room.

The kang came to an end there, so it was extremely cold, especially the part of the wall facing north, where the bricks were no different from blocks of ice.

And yet the girl insisted on remaining there. Perhaps it was because the injured young man was on the kang, or maybe it was because that place was closest to the stove. The pot on the stove was cooking meat, which gurgled and bubbled in the stew.

Her hands gripped a bowl and chopsticks. Her eyes were extremely focused on the stewing meat, making her seem even more dull-witted.

"Since you know to be afraid of getting burned, it seems that

you're not truly an imbecile."

The officer shook his head at her, then walked to the edge of the kang and sat down.

As time passed, the girl somewhat loosened her guard, but the injured young man remained unconscious.

He began to flip through the man's belongings, hoping to find a few clues, but he left empty-handed.

The young man had not been carrying any money, travel documents, a household registry, or even a scrap of paper. His clothes were made of the most ordinary of materials, and he wasn't carrying any accessories that might offer any useful information, only wearing a string of stone pearls on his wrist.

Those stone pearls seemed rather crude, with nothing special about them.

Upon recalling the scent he had smelled by the cliff, the young officer lowered his head to the man's neck and took in a deep whiff. Although he was not sure whether this was the scent he had smelled earlier, he was now very sure that the smell of many herbs was coming from the injured man's body.

He had smelled at least seventeen different herbs on him.

"So you're a pharmacist. No wonder you were in such a hurry and

took such a risk."

He looked at the young man and sighed, "Dying for wealth, I suppose you really did find the proper place."

The fires of war had blazed without end for two years, and even with the provinces and the south working together to provide assistance, many resources were still in short supply on the frontlines, especially medicinal ingredients. It was no secret that all the army headquarters were lacking in medicine. To those pharmacists that had not received permits from the Imperial Court, as long as they could bring medicinal ingredients to the frontlines, they could quickly sell them off for massive profit. As for the hazards they might encounter and the strict punishments of the court, such things did not even exist in their minds.

An aide brought in hot water and said to him, "Sir, let us handle this."

The young officer began to agree, but upon seeing the girl sitting at the base of the wall, he shook his head.

The girl gripped her bowl and chopsticks, her sluggish eyes full of coldness, or perhaps numbness. Only when looking upon the meat in the pot would they thaw somewhat. She looked just like a small beast that had been subjected to countless tortures, stirring the sympathy of others.

"It's still better to let me do it. Since I've saved him, I should also make sure he lives."

When the young officer made this decision, he had no idea that this imbecilic girl who easily made him recall matters of the past was the little Princess of the Demon race, let alone that the unconscious young man was connected to him.

He only felt that the girl looked rather pitiful. At the same time, though the injured young man had been unconscious the entire time, his eyes closed, he inexplicably gave a very calm and clean feeling. In short, he was rather pleasing to the eye.

Just like this, the young man and girl that had fallen from the mountains remained in the horse farm at Sloping Cliff, gaining the attentive care of the officers and soldiers there.

The young officer devoted the most energy, as cooking meat and treating illness had always been important matters of state.

After several days, the young man finally awoke from his coma.

He did not immediately open his eyes, but used five breaths of time to calm his mind. He then performed Meditative Introspection to confirm the state of his injuries.

Only after confirming the severity of his injuries did he finally open his eyes.

The first thing to be reflected in his eyes was the young officer.

He thought to himself, although this person has a full beard, he doesn't look like some devil or fiend, but actually rather pleasing to the eye.

It was only after a very long time that Zhexiu, Tang Thirty-Six, Gou Hanshi, and Guan Feibai learned of the circumstances at that time.

Both the people of the Orthodox Academy and the people of the Mount Li Sword Sect fell silent for a very long time, all thinking, were the two of you blind?

Chapter 790 – Naive and Imbecilic, Two Bowls of Soup

Before he opened his eyes, before he calmed his mind for five breaths, what lay before Chen Changsheng's eyes was the night sky and those densely packed Essence Qi Locks. The final scene in his memory was of him and Nanke dropping to the ground, the black and white surface of the snowy mountains getting closer and closer.

What followed was a heavy thud, endless pain, and infinite darkness.

Upon waking from the darkness, he did not know how much time had passed, only that he was still alive. As he had calmed his mind for five breaths, he had also performed Meditative Introspection, through which he realized that his meridians were covered in cracks. If an ordinary cultivator realized that they had suffered such serious wounds, they would undoubtedly panic, even despair. However, he was very experienced in this aspect and so maintained his calm. He was even able to accurately determine that the most serious wounds had been inflicted by the Demon Lord's counterattack.

He opened his eyes and saw a bearded face. This beard was quite lush, looking like a shrub that had not been pruned for several decades. Unless one carefully looked, it would be very difficult to find where that person's eyes were.

But one only needed to see that person's eyes to be instantly transfixed. These were clear and bright eyes, reserved yet hiding a

warmth deep within. It was like the rising sun behind the morning clouds. Though unwilling to easily reveal its true appearance, everyone knew that it was assuredly a very moving sight.

Eyes were the window to the soul and one could glimpse much through them.

Chen Changsheng had seen many pairs of eyes, like the vast sea of stars that were his mMarital uUncle the Pope's eyes, or Xu Yourong's eyes that were like a bare mountain after a fresh rain. However, he was forced to admit that this person's eyes were quite appealing, much more appealing than their bearded face.

"Awake?" the person asked.

Chen Changsheng noticed the person's clothes, realized that they were an officer of the Great Zhou, and felt more at ease.

The young officer guessed that he still could not speak for the moment and said of his own accord, "This place is the Sloping Cliff Horse Farm. I am the commanding officer here. My name is..."

He paused, then continued, "Luo Bu."

Chen Changsheng thought, for some reason, this name sounds a little strange.

"First answer a few questions for me. Blink your eyes once for yes, twice for no."

The officer called Luo Bu looked at his eyes and asked, "You are a person of Zhou?"

Without hesitation, Chen Changsheng blinked once.

Luo Bu asked, "A pharmacist?"

Chen Changsheng hesitated for a few moments, then blinked twice.

Luo Bu smiled, revealing a mouth filled with white teeth, looking like a sun while also revealing his true age.

Chen Changsheng did not know why such a young person would conceal their face in such a thick beard.

He could not help but ponder this question.

"It's fine if you're not willing to admit. In any case, you can't possibly be a spy. Rest well. Although I don't know if you can recover, you shouldn't die. By the way, about that girl, I don't know if she's always been like that or if she got it from the fall, but don't worry yourself."

After saying this, Luo Bu exited the room.

Nanke carried a bowl of meat and walked from the corner of the

room to the bedside.

She slightly tilted her head, her sluggish eyes filled with confusion as she examined Chen Changsheng's face, as if she had never seen him before. Suddenly, she seemed to recall something and placed the bowl of meat in front of Chen Changsheng, indicating that he should eat.

Chen Changsheng had no idea what was happening and arduously managed to shake his head.

Only by eating meat can you have strength," Nanke said, staring into his eyes.

Chen Changsheng thought, what do I need to do that requires strength?

Nanke seemed to understand the meaning in his eyes. She placed the bowl by the pillow and used her fingers to point at the center of her eyebrows. With great solemnity, she spoke two words.

"Cure illness."

Upon seeing this, Chen Changsheng finally understood.

In the battle over the dark and snowy mountains, Nanke had allowed her divine soul to completely awaken for the second time to break through the trap laid down by the Demon Lord and Black Robe. In the end, she had failed to break through that bottleneck

and her sea of consciousness had taken severe damage. To speak plainly, she was now truly an imbecile.

Right now, she no longer remembered anything, including who Chen Changsheng was. All she remembered was that Chen Changsheng had promised to cure her illness.

Chen Changsheng looked silently into her eyes for a long time. Of course, he didn't have the ability to speak right now in the first place.

He could speak in his heart to himself, to others.

Since I promised, I will definitely cure you, even if I don't have the confidence.

The present Nanke had no idea what sort of illness she had, only that he had promised to cure it.

But she once more understood the meaning in his eyes and felt happy. She heartily laughed, cute and naive.

Chen Changsheng did not remember seeing Nanke ever laugh in the Garden of Zhou or the snowy mountains. In his eyes and in the eyes of the common people, she had always been cold-blooded, emotionless, cruel, and murderous. How could she possibly be associated with this bubbly and sweet little girl?

Only now did Chen Changsheng notice that she was wearing a

cotton jacket, and her hair was in two carelessly tied buns, the handiwork of some person. He suddenly realized that this was a military camp of the Great Zhou, and if someone were to realize her true identity, it would cause massive trouble.

She was a member of the Imperial clan, so her demon horns were concealed, but where had her two wings gone?

A piece of stewed meat was sent to his lips, breaking his train of thought. There was not much salt in this meat, making it rather tasteless, but it had been stewed until it was very easy to chew.

Crucially, the one feeding him meat was the little Princess of the Demon race.

Chen Changsheng very naturally began to think of the little Princess of the Dragon race, Zhizhi, and also the little Princess of the Demon race that Su Li had married.

Where was the little Black Dragon right now?

As the Pope's appointed Protector, she had established a connection with Chen Changsheng, and Chen Changsheng had methods of informing her and having her come to him.

But he would not do this.

A year and a half ago, he was injured on the battlefield by Hai Di and relied completely on the little Black Dragon to escape with his

life. Who could have expected that in his journey through the mountains, he would be pursued and assaulted several times by experts from the Imperial Court? He had not had the Li Palace look into this matter, but the experience inevitably had a chilling effect on his heart.

Even Su Li, with all his ability and daring, still had to silently endure as he journeyed back from the snowy plains, so how could Chen Changsheng be an exception?

After this incident, he finally understood just how naive he had been when he had announced the presence of Su Li in the spring radiance of Xunyang City.

At present, when he had no ability to protect himself, he would never communicate with Zhizhi, much less have her come and expose his location.

The present him was no longer so naive.

Nanke began to feed him the meat soup. It was not cold or hot, but just right.

The stone pearls were still on his wrist while everything else had already been sent into the Garden of Zhou. His belly was a little warm, and logically speaking, this was the time for him to calmly rest. But he still felt that something wasn't quite right, that he had apparently forgotten something.

Had that officer called Luo Bu really not sensed anything? Why had he been able to so easily trust in him and Nanke? This Sloping Cliff Horse Farm was clearly very remote, but how could someone who could become a commanding officer at such a young age be so naive?

The curtain in front of the door to the room lifted and the cold wind blew in, as did Luo Bu. In his hands was a bowl of pitch-black medicinal broth.

Chapter 791 – One Great General of Sloping Cliff

Luo Bu wanted to exchange the meat soup in Nanke's hands with medicinal broth, but Nanke did not.

She looked to Chen Changsheng. With some difficulty, Chen Changsheng blinked his eyes, and then, with even greater difficulty, he turned his head towards Luo Bu and used his eyes to express his thanks.

The bowl of medicinal broth was brought to his lips, and he noticed that the bowl had been cleaned very well. There was no leftover odor from food or smears of grease.

He then smelled seventeen different medicinal ingredients in the broth. In the capital, these ingredients were far from precious, but in this sort of remote horse farm, they were probably very difficult to gather. Of course, what shocked him the most was not the cleanliness of the bowl or the ingredients prepared, but the medical arts Luo Bu had displayed in this medicinal broth.

As meat soup and medicinal broth switched back and forth, time passed, and Chen Changsheng and Nanke had now stayed in Sloping Cliff Horse Farm for four days.

Nanke remained an imbecile, unaware of who Chen Changsheng was or who she was. She only had a vague recollection that Chen Changsheng was very important to her, so she spent every day keeping watch at his side, cooling his medicine, cooking meat, and

bathing him, just like a maid. In addition, she would warily stare at any person who dared to approach the room, with only one exception, and that was Luo Bu.

In those first three days in which he couldn't speak, Chen Changsheng often thought that perhaps this was because Luo Bu had given her a lot of meat to eat?

On the fourth day, he was still unable to get out of bed, but his body could now make a few gentle movements, like turning his body or raising his hands. Most importantly, he could finally speak. To his surprise, the officer called Luo Bu did not continue to inquire into his origins.

Although this was a remote horse farm, there were still many matters that needed taking care of. As commanding officer, Luo Bu naturally could not laze away in that room forever. On many occasions, the one to deliver the medicinal broth was one of his bodyguards or another officer of the horse farm. Due to the properties of his bloodline and also because he practiced the Dao of following his heart, Chen Changsheng had a special trait that made others want to get to know him. At the time, even the Black Goat of the Imperial Palace and the Black Dragon beneath New North Bridge had been affected by this trait, so how could these soldiers with relatively pure and simple minds resist? In a very short period of time, he had grown familiar with them.

As long as they ignored Nanke's gaze, which was like that of a small beast protecting its food, the conversation between Chen Changsheng and those soldiers proceeded very smoothly. He developed a more vivid picture of the situation on the frontlines,

had a more direct understanding of the minds of the soldiers, and most importantly, he came to understand the story of Sloping Cliff Horse Farm and Luo Bu.

Anyone who heard Luo Bu's story would inevitably feel a great deal of sympathy and anger at the injustice committed towards him, and Chen Changsheng was no exception.

He believed that Luo Bu had been able to accumulate so many military achievements in these past years not because of luck or backing, but because he truly was very competent.

Just from looking at Sloping Cliff Horse Farm's everyday administration and life, which seemed gentle and lazy, but was actually extremely orderly, one could see this officer's management techniques and his skill in using them. Moreover, just a few courses of medicinal broth from him had led Chen Changsheng's injuries to quickly recover, which was proof of this person's extraordinary skill in medicine.

Of course, these were impressions obtained through conversation and naturally inferior to one's own experience.

If he wanted to experience it for himself, he first needed to rise from bed and stroll about the horse farm.

But it never occurred to him to wonder about just why the officer called Luo Bu interested him so.

On the seventh day, Chen Changsheng got out of bed.

Back when Zhexiu had suffered innumerable tortures in Zhou Prison and had his meridians ruptured, he had ultimately relied on the stimulation of pain to recover in the shortest amount of time, and Chen Changsheng had used the same method. He had spent the last few nights in constant battle with an unimaginable pain.

Nanke had been attending to him the entire time, using a towel to wipe his sweat, helping him drink water, and gently massaging his abdomen. Her actions were naturally quite clumsy, but they were very sincere, and she devoted a vast amount of energy to him. Only in the late hours of the night, when she saw him finally fall quiet, did she finally relax and fall asleep. Surprisingly, she did not realize when he left the room.

The early morning light fell on the meadow between the mountains. Through the thin fog drifting down from the mountains, a few noises could be heard from the just-awakened horse herds.

Chen Changsheng picked up a tree branch and used it to prop up his frail body as he randomly walked about the horse farm.

It wasn't that he didn't cherish his body. On the contrary, it was only through movement that he could firm up his newly reconnected meridians as quickly as possible.

The Sloping Cliff Horse Farm covered a vast area. Besides barracks and arrow towers, it also had array pivots. These seemed

randomly placed in various nooks, but upon careful examination, one could see that their formation would ensure that they would have the greatest effect when confronting an enemy.

Chen Changsheng was well-versed in the Daoist Canon, but he had not learned military strategy. That he was able to see through the array of Sloping Cliff Horse Farm in a glance was because when Su Li was teaching him the sword on the long journey from the snowy plains back to the south, he also taught him of knowledge in those aspects.

From the wooden fences around the array pivots and the freshness of the mud at their base, he could see that this arrangement had been modified after Luo Bu's arrival at the Sloping Cliff Horse Farm.

The more he saw, the more Chen Changsheng felt that the military principles reflected in the arrangement of this array perfectly corroborated the knowledge that Su Li had passed on to him. He couldn't help but feel a great admiration for Luo Bu, but he did not associate this thought with a few certain matters.

The mountains of the north were high, imposing, and unfeeling, while the climate was temperamental. The chilly dawn suddenly kicked up a bone-chilling gale. Countless grains of sand were carried up by the frenzied winds and blown into the mountains towards the horse farm. In an instant, the world turned gloomy.

The sounds of whistling warning arrows, harsh orders, and hurried footsteps could be heard throughout the camp.

Chen Changsheng did not wish to add to the chaos. Holding his tree branch, he made his way back by slowly walking along the eaves of the buildings. Upon raising his head, he saw Luo Bu.

Luo Bu was very happy to see him able to walk. Revealing his mouth full of white teeth, he said, "Congratulations."

At this moment, he was in a rush to command his subordinates in dealing with the sandstorm, so he had no time to say anything else. Glancing at the tree branch in Chen Changsheng's armpit, he shook his head and pointed at the door behind him, indicating that Chen Changsheng should hide there for the time being.

With Chen Changsheng's speed, by the time he had trudged back to his original room, the sandstorm would have undoubtedly engulfed him. He had no reason to refuse and obediently walked in. Without waiting for him to turn around, Luo Bu closed the door, and then a clear clap came from outside.

Luo Bu had most likely struck some sort of switch on the wall or door. A thick bar of wood blocked the door while several firm planks of wood dropped down and tightly sealed the windows. At the same time, an oil lamp on the table suddenly began to glow, despite the lack of flame.

Chen Changsheng did not misunderstand, so he did not panic. After carefully examining the mechanisms in the room, he discovered that they were of simple but exquisite construction. Even the most ordinary person would be able to operate them.

Presumably, all the living quarters in the horse farm were outfitted similarly, a fact which made him completely relax.

Right after, several objects on the table attracted his gaze.

The dusky light of the lamp shone over the table and illuminated several pieces of paper.

This was extremely precious paper from Shi Province. Let alone a remote horse farm like this, such paper would even be difficult to find in the Mount Song Army headquarters.

Some of the papers had calligraphy, while others held drawings.

Chen Changsheng was not skilled in poetry, calligraphy, or painting, but being well-versed in the Daoist Canon, he had a well-developed eye.

The words were written superbly, their vigorous character concealed under a plump exterior, disdaining to be seen by others.

[The paintings were also excellent.](#) One was a large painting of spring and autumn done in the xieyi style, while the other was a painting of birds and flowers reflecting the world done in the gongbi style

Just whose room was this? Who had painted these drawings and written these words?

In such an out-of-the-way horse farm, how could there be someone who could so extravagantly use Shi Province paper, who could write such fine words and paint such fine paintings?

In his heart, Chen Changsheng faintly knew the answer.

And then he saw the signature on the two paintings.

Xieyi and gongbi are two contrasting styles of Chinese painting, the first more freehand and expressive, the second emphasizing careful brushwork.

Chapter 792 – Why Do Young People Laugh?

The two paintings were signed with the same six words.

'One great general of Sloping Cliff'.

Chen Changsheng's first reaction upon seeing this signature was 'how bold', but after a few moments, he felt them to be very lonely.

I am a great general; how can I not be proud when I look around?

Though I am only a great general of this remote place called Sloping Cliff Horse Farm.

And I am the only great general.

Boldness and loneliness were two feelings very difficult to combine, but now they seemed to leap together out of the paper.

Chen Changsheng looked behind the desk and saw a bookshelf filled with books, consisting of both interpretations of profound Daoist doctrines and ordinary novels. A trait they shared was that they were all very clean. To accomplish such a task in a place scourged by sandstorms year-round was no easy feat, yet he could understand how this had been done.

He often used that method to clean the books in the library of the Orthodox Academy.

He had already guessed that this was Luo Bu's room, and now when he thought about how that person carried a rare spatial artifact with him, he became even more curious. Suddenly, he caught a whiff of a scent and, upon tracking it down, realized that a bowl still half-full of yogurt had been placed on the bookshelf. Just seeing the smooth surface of the yogurt, sprinkled with sesame seeds and topped by a cherry, made his fingers twitch. He could not resist bringing up the bowl of yogurt and examining it. He confirmed that this was not food from the barracks but a snack Luo Bu had probably made for himself last night.

Now, Chen Changsheng was truly convinced, even feeling a sense of inferiority.

From Xining Village to the capital, he had met countless young and talented geniuses of cultivation. Senior Yu Ren, Gou Hanshi, Zhexiu, Xu Yourong, and even himself were these sorts of people. However, he had never once encountered this sort of complete genius, a genius in every domain.

Yes, in Chen Changsheng's view, this young officer called Luo Bu could be described as almost perfect.

Fortunately, although this person is skilled at medical arts, he's not as good as me, he said to himself in comfort.

The howling of the wind and pounding of sand outside the window gradually faded away. From the distance came several shrill whistles, followed by footsteps.

Several clunking sounds could be heard from outside as the wooden bars over the door and windows sprang open on their own and Luo Bu walked in.

Sunlight once more illuminated the room. Dispersed by the remnants of the sandstorm, the sunlight smeared an ancient aura over the entire room, making it look rather picturesque.

Everything happened too quickly and Chen Changsheng did not have time to return the bowl of yogurt to the bookshelf.

Anyone who saw him would believe that he was just preparing to sneakily take a bite of the yogurt.

Luo Bu probably thought so.

The mood in the room was rather awkward.

The silence persisted.

Luo Bu turned and walked out of the room, saying, "I'm going to take a look at the grass."

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The reason the Great Zhou Imperial Court had established a horse farm in a place so remote and deep in the mountains as Sloping Cliff was precisely that the meadows of Sloping Cliff were lush with the frost grass most beloved by Dragonhorses. It was only right that Luo Bu, as commanding officer, went to see the state of the grass after a sandstorm, but Chen Changsheng with bowl of yogurt in hand was well aware that this was just an excuse, just like how he hurriedly said that he would also take a look at the grass as an excuse to put down the bowl of yogurt as naturally as possible.

The sandstorm had already stopped, but the marks of its devastation were still evident. The barracks and stables were not harmed, but two repeating crossbow huts in the distance required repair, and most troubling of all was that the frost grass growing on the fields was now covered in a thick layer of dust.

Disregarding their slightly troublesome temper, Dragonhorses were essentially perfect mounts for war, but no cavalry soldier would disregard how greatly these horses desired their food to be clean. Unless the frost grass growing on these mountains was washed, they would never eat it. Moreover, with the number of soldiers stationed at Sloping Cliff Horse Farm, it was simply impossible to wash this grass by hand. Both man and horse could only wait for rain to fall from the sky.

Perhaps for this reason, the several hundred Dragonhorses pacing about the meadow by the stream were rather irritable. Occasionally, one of them would neigh and kick a rock. On the side, the soldiers cursed as they carried out repairs.

As a figure appeared, the Dragonhorses instantly became much more quiet. The soldiers, too, became as quiet as insects in winter.

This figure was Luo Bu.

Luo Bu did not issue any reprimands, only waved his hand to indicate that everyone should return to work.

The soldiers knew that their general's mood today was not bad, and relaxed.

At this moment, a bodyguard that had once delivered medicine saw Chen Changsheng at Luo Bu's side and called out in shock.

The brother and sister pharmacists that had been rescued at Sloping Cliff Horse Farm were the most interesting matter to occur in the past few years to these bored soldiers who had not even seen a demon. Many people knew of this matter and had even sneaked to that room to take a look at Chen Changsheng. Those soldiers who had chatted with Chen Changsheng before were more acquainted with him and went up to offer their congratulations.

"Little Cripple, you can finally get out of bed?"

"Little Cripple, you can finally walk?"

"Little Cripple, you can come out to take in a little sunlight now?"

The soldiers of Sloping Cliff Horse Farm had been addressing Chen Changsheng as Little Cripple this entire time, as he was very young, born with a tender face, and was confined to bed by his heavy injuries. There was no ill will in this nickname and Chen Changsheng, having grown up with Senior Yu Ren, did not feel too conflicted about it. He only felt that since his meridians were only temporarily broken, he was not truly a cripple, so this nickname was not correct. As a result, he could not accept and would correct these soldiers each time.

But the more earnestly he rejected this moniker, the happier the soldiers of Sloping Cliff Horse Farm were to use it. They just wanted to tease, but the soldiers were made somewhat helpless by the fact that the bedridden youth never once showed anger on his face, only an eternal indifference.

Just like now.

"I am not a cripple."

Chen Changsheng looked at them and explained, "All of you can see that I can now get out of bed and walk."

Someone teased, "Aren't you still limping? How about you take two steps?"

Chen Changsheng very obediently used the tree branch to help him take two steps.

He had only been able to get out of bed last night, after which he had been walking constantly. To his still-frail body, this was a rather significant burden, so when he took these two steps, they were somewhat unsteady, frightening those soldiers into hurriedly stepping forward to support him.

A bodyguard shouted out, "Stop trying to be brave. And besides, what does it matter if you can walk two steps? We're on the frontlines, on a horse farm. When you can get on a horse, then we can consider you recovered."

He had good intentions, but to the crowd, it sounded like teasing, at which they began to laugh.

The Dragonhorses raised in Sloping Cliff Horse Farm were the primary mount of the black-armored cavalry's main force. They were extremely brave and fierce on the battlefield, had very bad tempers, and were extremely shy. Even the most elite of cavalry needed to spend at least a hundred days interacting with a Dragonhorse in order to establish a strong relationship and make it their mount. At the moment, Chen Changsheng needed the help of another to stand steady, so how could he mount a Dragonhorse?

Luo Bu had remained silent all this time. Now, however, the lips concealed beneath his beard perked into a faint smile while his eyes turned somewhat indifferent. Only the people closest to him knew that his mood at this moment was not very good.

He was not pleased that his subordinates were teasing Chen

Changsheng.

To his surprise, Chen Changsheng was still not angry, and there was even a smile on his face.

Although this was a faint smile, it was very sincere, not feigned at all.

The several hundred Dragonhorses made their way from the stream to deeper into the meadow. As the morning light gradually flourished, they arrived on the outskirts of the crowd.

One of the horses suddenly stopped and turned its head to gaze at the crowd, where it seemed like something rather bewildering had occurred.

Ultimately, its gaze fell on Chen Changsheng's body, and it seemed to think, just what is this young person laughing so happily about?

Chapter 793 – Inviting the Lord Off the Mountain

The surface of frost grass was covered in an extremely shallow surface of white wool, which was precisely the part that Dragonhorses enjoyed eating the most. The grass after the sandstorm was covered in a dusty coat, but this was true dust, so the horse herd had no place to start eating. They had stood around the stream and looked for a very long time until they had seen everything there was to see. In the end, they could only helplessly turn around and return.

Anyone, whether man or horse, would be unhappy after being presented with a great feast that they were unable to take a single bite of. If they were to see someone laughing happily at this moment, they would inevitably assume that the person was ridiculing them. Regardless of what that person might have thought, it was very obvious that the horse looking towards Chen Changsheng was thinking this.

It suddenly charged towards Chen Changsheng.

As the most outstanding warhorse, the Dragonhorse, no matter how awful its temper, would never randomly strike out against soldiers. The soldiers were well aware that this Dragonhorse only wanted to give Chen Changsheng a fright. Usually, this sort of playing around wouldn't even be worth their attention, but when they thought of how Chen Changsheng had still not recovered and had only just regained his ability to walk, they still warily gripped their staves.

What happened next surprised everybody.

The Dragonhorse did not continue charging forward. When it was still ten-some zhang away, it slowed down into a trot. Its head swayed side to side as if extremely confused, its nostrils constantly flaring as if it was smelling something, the sense of mischief in its eyes quickly replaced by a desire to be friends.

It trotted up to Chen Changsheng and deferentially lowered its head, apparently wishing for Chen Changsheng to stroke it.

The remaining Dragonhorses noticed this activity and began running over, just like the first Dragonhorse. They circled around Chen Changsheng and very carefully began to rub against him, finding it very difficult to suppress their happiness. A bolder Dragonhorse even sneakily licked the hand that Chen Changsheng was using to hold the tree branch.

Upon seeing this sight, the soldiers of Sloping Cliff Horse Farm were utterly flabbergasted, their laughter having stopped long ago. Just what was going on here?

At this moment, the leader of the herd, the finest Dragonhorse of them all, pushed through the surrounding horses and came up to Chen Changsheng. It humbly bent its forelegs and kneeled on the ground.

It was apparently asking Chen Changsheng to mount it, or perhaps asking Chen Changsheng to grant it his blessing.

Gasps of shock rose from the surrounding crowd.

Standing on the outskirts, Luo Bu was no longer smiling. He quietly gazed at Chen Changsheng in the center of the herd, a pensive look on his face.

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On the same night, the starlight remained the same as ever, a pot of meat soup was still boiling on the stove in the room, and yet it was not as noisy as it had been the past few nights.

There was no soldier of Sloping Cliff Horse Farm chatting with Chen Changsheng in the room, as he had a guest tonight.

Luo Bu glanced at Nanke, who was by the stove staring at the pot of meat, then turned to Chen Changsheng on the bed. Without any attempt to hide his intentions, he straightaway declared, "You are naturally not an ordinary person."

Chen Changsheng thought of that essentially perfect array laid out amongst the fields and that study room, and returned, "You are naturally no ordinary person either."

Luo Bu stared into his eyes and asked, "Your falling down from the mountain has nothing to do with me?"

"Nothing." Chen Changsheng calmly returned the stare and said, "From a certain perspective, I truly am a pharmacist."

Luo Bu calmly asked, "So in your stroll around Sloping Cliff Horse Farm, did you see what you wanted to see?"

Chen Changsheng very sincerely answered, "I did."

"What did you see?"

"I saw that this place called Sloping Cliff has a great general."

Luo Bu fell quiet for a while at these words, then said, "Directly state your meaning."

Chen Changsheng looked into his eyes and requested, "I want to invite you off the mountain."

Off what mountain?

The vast mountain range of Mount Han.

Beyond Mount Han was the snowy plains, the true battlefield against the demons.

Chen Changsheng continued, "I don't know if you're aware, but

Ning Shiwei is dead, so the Mount Song Army requires a new Divine General."

Luo Bu fell silent, then asked, "Is my understanding correct? You admire me so much that you have decided to push me onto the position of Divine General of the Mount Song Army?"

Chen Changsheng said nothing, tacitly affirming that this truly was what he thought. At the same time, he noticed that although Luo Bu had been demoted to the remote Sloping Cliff Horse Farm, he seemingly had a grasp of news from the Mount Song Army headquarters and from even higher-level places. This made him even more curious to this person's background.

"Even a pharmacist is able to decide who becomes a Divine General. I can roughly understand why the Great Zhou Dynasty is going downhill."

Luo Bu looked at him and smiled. "So are you someone from the Prince of Xiang or the Tianhai clan? Or are you a secret agent from that Daoist monastery in Luoyang?"

The secret agents of that Daoist monastery in Luoyang mentioned here were those blue-clothed Daoists standing at the venerable Shang Xingzhou's side.

After two years, Chen Changsheng felt a little emotional to hear his master brought up once more.

He did not explain his origins to Luo Bu, nor did he explain why he wanted to do this.

Because he did not represent the Prince of Xiang, the Tianhai clan, or any faction in the Great Zhou Imperial Court. He represented the Li Palace, the Orthodoxy, the world.

He was the Pope, so he had to bear the weight of the world, so it was only right that he ponder the future of the Human race.

In his view, a person like Luo Bu being left in a place like Sloping Cliff Horse Farm was truly a waste as enormous as the heavens.

"I basically understand what you're thinking. 'Waste of talent', 'unrecognized' and all those other banal phrases."

Luo Bu calmly said to him, "But you don't know that I came to Sloping Cliff Horse Farm to seclude myself. Perhaps it might be better to say that I was forced into seclusion, but it was still something that I accepted."

Chen Changsheng seriously said to him, "If you were forced here by external pressures, perhaps I can help you resolve some of it."

For some reason, the more serious Chen Changsheng became, the more relaxed Luo Bu looked. Perhaps it was because he was thinking of those serious companions of his, which made him recall that time in which sword Qi filled the mountains. He subconsciously looked at his own chest and thought to himself, in

the end, there are some matters that I have to resolve on my own. So he shook his head.

"I don't like trouble."

"I also don't want to give you any trouble."

"So I will not leave the mountain."

Luo Bu calmly and concisely ended their conversation over this, then said, "In another two days, when your injuries are better, I will have someone send you off."

Chen Changsheng thought this over, then said, "Very well. In the future if you have a problem, come and find me."

Luo Bu smiled. "I don't like finding others—it's quite troublesome."

These indifferent words of his concealed an extremely elegant self-confidence, just like the signatures on those two paintings.

Chen Changsheng replied, "The favor of saving a life must be repaid."

Luo Bu replied, "Do whatever you please, there's no need to say it."

Chen Changsheng replied, "A friend taught me that there are some matters that should be done if they need to be done, but it's even more important to talk about them if they need to be talked about."

Luo Bu felt that these words were rather meaningful and replied, "That friend of yours is either a false gentleman or a truly low person."

Chen Changsheng thought of that friend that he had not seen for two years and had not received a letter from for half a year. Concern suddenly bubbled forth from his heart and became impossible to suppress.

He explained very sincerely to Luo Bu, "That friend of mine is a false low person and a true gentleman."

Luo Bu laughed at his words, then he turned to Nanke and asked, "Is she really your younger sister?"

A deeper meaning lay in these words.

Chen Changsheng heard this meaning loud and clear, but he could not abandon Nanke, so he nodded his head.

"At times, a liar is not necessarily an ignorant and fake person. On the contrary, they might be a true person."

Luo Bu smiled at him and continued, "I don't know who you are,

who you represent, or whether you mean good or bad, but I know at least that in this aspect, I deeply admire you."

The room fell quiet, the only sound being the gurgling of the meat in the pot.

Nanke ladled out a bowl of meat soup and walked over to the bed.

Hurried footsteps came from outside the room.

The door to the room burst open and a bodyguard charged in, shouting out something in shock, completely unaware that he was about to run into Nanke.

Chapter 794 – The World Is Infinite, So Never Stop, Whether Day or Night

The bodyguard ran straight into Nanke, so surely heads should have broken, blood should have flowed, and meat soup should have flown, yet such a scene did not take place.

Nanke remained standing where she originally was, the bowl of meat soup gripped firmly in her hand, while the bodyguard had already passed her position.

This was very strange. The bodyguard had no idea what had just occurred, and rubbed his head in confusion.

Luo Bu's pupils constricted, as he had been able to clearly make out what had just occurred. Just when the bodyguard was about to run into Nanke, Nanke took two steps back. After the bodyguard ran past, she stepped forward into her original position. All this had been done silently, as if she was a wraith, as if she had never moved at all.

Not even that great general who had plowed the fields outside White Emperor City, Jin Yulu, would have been able to move with such lightning-fast speed or use such a monstrous movement technique.

With his vast experience, even he knew of only one woman in the world who possessed such speed, and she certainly could not be this little girl.

Luo Bu calmly glanced at Nanke, then turned to his bodyguard and asked, "What's happened?"

"Retreat...retreat...the demons have retreated!"

The bodyguard gasped as he spoke, wearing an expression of mixed joy and confusion.

From every perspective, the demons' retreat was a good thing, a matter worth being happy about, even ecstatic, but...it was too sudden.

Just like the bodyguard and the vast majority of soldiers at Sloping Cliff Horse Farm, countless numbers of people in the Mount Song Army headquarters, in Black Mountain Army headquarters, in Blue Pass and Snowhold Pass, and even in the distant capital were shocked and happy at this abrupt news, after which they began to feel a few strange emotions.

Two years ago, when this war began, the coup of the Mausoleum of Books and the following turmoil in the Imperial Court had caused the Great Zhou Dynasty to be inadequately prepared, allowing the Demon Army to gain the advantage. Afterwards however, the two sides entered a long stalemate, with the Human race even gaining back a little advantage. The Demon Army, including its wolf cavalry, suffered heavy losses on the snowy plains and had still not derived any benefit from this war. Under these circumstances, how could the demons retreat first?

Just what was the Demon Lord thinking? And what was that Military Advisor Black Robe, famed for his scheming, thinking? Were they fighting this war for two years just to mess around, or was it to flaunt the new lord's martial prowess and firm up his position in Xuelao City?

Luo Bu was also rather surprised upon hearing this news. He had just heard the news that Divine General Ning Shiwei of the Mount Song Army had died, and did not know any more of the story.

Only Chen Changsheng was well aware of why the demons had retreated.

A bit more than two years ago, a coup took place in the Mausoleum of Books near the capital, while a bloody rebellion took place in Xuelao City.

The Demon Army abruptly began moving south, but it was not to take the lands and riches of the Human race; it was to seek out the Demon Lord, simultaneously concealing Xuelao City's true intent. To the new Demon Lord, Black Robe, and the Demon Commander, as long as they could kill the Demon Lord, what did one war and hundreds of thousands of dead matter?

On that night, the Demon Lord had finally died in that garden nestled in Mount Han, so what reason did the Demon Army have to stay?

Even now, only a select few people in the world knew the true reason for the Demon Army's retreat. Many soldiers were rather

perplexed, while people like Zhexiu and Guan Feibai were quite displeased. In the end, however, this was still a matter worth celebrating, and even a place as remote as Sloping Cliff Horse Farm received a victory reward from the Mount Song Army headquarters.

Amongst this far-from-generous reward, what the soldiers most welcomed was two carriages carrying wyvern meat. Wyverns were not true dragons, but monsters native to Mount Han widely known for the delicacy and tenderness of their meat. It was regarded by the gourmets of the world as the perfect companion to alcohol.

After nightfall, ten-some bonfires were lit amongst the mountains, with the wyvern meat suspended over the spits and exuding an exotic yet not oily fragrance from the fat.

A faint ruckus could be heard from the distant horse herd, perhaps because they were in breeding season and the extra frost grass had stirred even more impulses in them.

Chen Changsheng sat by a bonfire with a plate in his hands, two pieces of freshly-roasted wyvern meat on it.

The meat had been personally roasted by Nanke and the edges were somewhat scorched, but it was still edible.

He looked to his side and saw Nanke happily gnawing away, her small face covered in oil.

He suddenly thought that if Zhizhi were here, she would definitely be very angry, and what of Yourong?

Then he remembered that that guy called Qiushan Jun had the blood of the true Dragon.

For some reason, this thought made him happy and the meat on the plate somewhat more fragrant.

As the night deepened, the countless stars shone their light on the mountains. The horses fell quiet while the soldiers by their bonfires continued eating and drinking, constantly cheering and joking.

Chen Changsheng noticed that he had not seen Luo Bu this entire time.

He stood up, looked around, then walked towards the mountain stream.

This stream, formed from the thawing snow off the mountains, was very clear. It flowed towards the plains of the north, unlike the vast majority of the continent's rivers, which flowed west.

Starlight shone over the stream, making it appear like a gorgeous belt of silver.

The frost grass growing amongst the mountains had always had a shallow layer of white wool, but now, when dyed by the starlight,

it appeared like true frost.

A figure sat beneath the starlight, somewhat lonely.

Chen Changsheng walked over and sat by this figure.

Perhaps because the starlight was too magnificent, the lush beard was unable to completely conceal that face's true appearance.

Chen Changsheng once more confirmed that Luo Bu was very young, only a few years older than he was.

"What are you thinking about?"

Luo Bu was not eating meat, only drinking wine.

A small and exquisite wine pot was held between his two fingers, slightly swaying in the wind and starlight as if flaunting its elegance.

Upon hearing Chen Changsheng's question, Luo Bu paused, then replied, "About how the world is infinite."

Anyone who responded to such a simple question with this sort of answer would make others feel somewhat uncomfortable.

Yet when it came from his mouth, it gave the feeling that it was

completely logical for him to say these sorts of words.

Of course, if that friend of Chen Changsheng's were here, he might hold his belly and laugh, and then use harsh words to humiliate Luo Bu.

Chen Changsheng did not, as he came from Xining Village and not Wenshui City. Moreover, he often thought of similar problems, though he rarely discussed such things with others.

Not looking to the past or to the future, virtuous sages and wise sovereigns, tears dripping down in sorrow—in the end, [it would all flow west](#).

He thought of the Scroll of Time, also called the Canon of Flowing West, thought of the chains beneath New North Bridge, the grave underneath the Orthodox Academy that no one knew of, thought of all those things that happened in the last ten years. He became deeply moved and, looking upon the beautiful mountains and river under the starlight, said, "Never stop, whether day or night."²

'What are you thinking?'

'About how the world is infinite.'

'Then you can never stop, whether day or night.'

One question, one answer, one response, yet there seemed no relation between them. The exchange seemed stiff and disjointed, but when carefully judged, it had its own flavor.

At this time, at this place, there should be wine.

Luo Bu glanced at Chen Changsheng and then placed the small wine pot in his hands.

Chen Changsheng appeared rather hesitant as he looked at the wine pot in his hand.

Luo Bu was somewhat surprised, asking, "You don't drink?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "My health wasn't very good when I was young, so I'm rather careful about this sort of thing."

Luo Bu was never someone that would force others to drink. Seeing Chen Changsheng in difficulty, he laughed it off and prepared to take back the wine pot.

However, Chen Changsheng raised the wine pot and took a drink.

Other than the part about flowing west, these lines are from a poem by Chen Zi'ang, an official who lived during the Tang Dynasty. In its complete form, the poem goes, 'Not looking to the virtuous sages of the past, nor to the wise sovereigns of the future, thinking about the infinite world, tears drip down my face in solitude and sorrow.'² I believe this a reference to a line from

'Analects', which goes, "The Master standing by a stream said, 'It passes on just like this, not ceasing day or night!'" The meaning here is that time flows ceaselessly on like a river.

Chapter 795 – The Starry Sky and Girls (I)

The alcohol in Chen Changsheng's throat was like a thread of red-hot metal. Chen Changsheng almost choked but barely managed to swallow it down, his face instantly turning red.

He did not expect that a person like Luo Bu would drink such fierce alcohol.

Of course, the primary reason was that Chen Changsheng truly did not drink much alcohol.

He had only gotten his first taste of alcohol after coming to the capital, and it had only been with Xu Yourong when they were eating beef ribs at Fortune Peace Road, and with Tang Tang.

To people who did not drink alcohol, the only reason they would do so was the partner that they were drinking with.

He began to yearn for the beef ribs of Fortune Peace Road, the Plum Garden Inn, and the great banyan tree in the Orthodox Academy.

Several years ago, on top of that great banyan tree, he and Tang Thirty-Six had engaged in a long chat in the twilight.

He returned the wine pot to Luo Bu and said, "I have a friend who wants to do a few things, but his family won't agree, and feels that he's just messing around. As a result, he has a lot of pressure."

Luo Bu smiled. His eyes were like the stars in the night sky, extremely bright and holding an infinite warmth, a boundless enthusiasm.

Chen Changsheng's eyes were also very bright, but it was not because of the light in their depths. Rather, they were very clean, as if they had been washed by water for many years.

Luo Bu looked at him and asked, "Has anyone ever mentioned that your eyes are like mirrors?"

Chen Changsheng didn't understand what he meant. Confused, he softly grunted in affirmation.

"A bright mirror can reflect a person, can reveal the finest movements of the world, can easily perceive many problems."

Luo Bu used two fingers to carry the wine pot and lightly sway it in the air as he said, "You guessed correctly. My problem does not come from me or from the outside world, but from my family. More precisely, it was my father that had me transferred from the roaming cavalry to Sloping Cliff Horse Farm."

Chen Changsheng considered this information, then asked, "He wants you to be safe?"

"No one knows what that father of mine is thinking. Many years ago, many people, including me, believed that he was just a

mediocre person who only thought about what was best for the clan. But events later on proved that those who thought this way were the truly mediocre people."

Luo Bu took a sip of wine and then continued, "Ever since I was small, my father has always treated me with extreme favor. I once doubted this favorable treatment, but after that event, I never doubted him again. But this sort of true favor has now become a true problem of mine."

He once more recalled the past.

His father descended down the mountain path, not even glancing at his severely injured son.

Startled birds flew out of the forest, carrying with them his father's cheerful and pleased laughter.

Chen Changsheng was also thinking of the past.

He walked down the Mausoleum of Books while his master walked up. On the Divine Path, they brushed past each other like strangers.

"In truth, I'm quite envious of this pressure brought about by concern."

After he said this, the stream bank welcomed a few moments of silence.

They were both youths, yet they each carried their own weight.

Suddenly, there was a splash as a silvery-white fish leapt from the water and swam up the stream in pursuit of the starlight.

The gazes of the pair followed it, ultimately resting on the vast barrens at the stream's end.

"If the injuries to your meridians were healed, then if you carefully looked, you might be able to see that it's a little brighter over there."

Luo Bu raised the wine pot in his hand, pointing at the distant north, seemingly out of respect, but also as if making an offering.

Chen Changsheng knew what he was speaking of. Back when he was traveling with Su Li across the snowy plains back to the south, on the first few nights, he would occasionally see that disc of light in the north. Moreover, in the Orthodox Academy, the taciturn Zhexiu had spoken of it to them several times.

Besides the river of stars in the south, the night sky there also contained a bright celestial body.

The legendary Moon of the Demon race.

Drinking wine was a leisurely affair, and so the content of their

chat was naturally idle gossip. Starting with the Moon of the demons, they talked about the forbidding aura of Xuelao City, the terrifying abyss, the decadent and crazed inclination towards art that the demon nobility had, the green gems on the Demon Commander's armor, and then about the conservatism and dullness of the Great Western Continent.

Luo Bu was the one speaking the vast majority of time, with Chen Changsheng occasionally responding with a sentence or two.

In this chat, Luo Bu revealed his unimaginable experience, his words containing a vast expanse of rivers and mountains and tens of thousands of years.

If Chen Changsheng had not become well-versed in the Daoist Canon as a child and also traversed tens of thousands of li, he would have found it utterly impossible to respond.

But it was precisely because he was well-versed in the Daoist Canon and had traversed tens of thousands of li that, though he was not skilled at speaking, he could occasionally offer a few sentences, discuss a few things.

Geniuses often wanted not for friends, but for someone that could understand the meaning behind their words.

Perhaps it was for this reason that this chat over wine proceeded very happily, with both Luo Bu and Chen Changsheng finding the experience very pleasant.

As their chat lengthened, its scope broadened and it became more profound. The more Chen Changsheng heard, the more he admired Luo Bu. Luo Bu was like a pool of clear water, seemingly unremarkable, yet with unfathomable depths. Was there anything in the world that he did not know?

Just who was this heavily-bearded young officer?

The more Chen Changsheng thought, the more he felt that this person was truly extraordinary, both his experience and his elegant bearing incredibly enchanting.

When Luo Bu began to recount the five mistakes Emperor Taizong and Wang Zhice made on the second northern expedition of the Great Zhou cavalry, Chen Changsheng could not help but consider all the extraordinary individuals he had met in his life. He realize that no one, not Gou Hanshi, or Zhexiu, or Tang Tang, or Su Moyu, matched up to this person.

He even felt that Senior Su Li was inferior to this person in certain aspects.

No matter how much a person like Luo Bu could make merry with soldiers, in such a remote horse farm, how could he not feel dejected or lonely?

If he was not, why he was sitting by his lonesome, far from the bonfires and under the stars, and then chatting for so long with him?

The more he thought, the more Chen Changsheng felt that he could not allow Luo Bu to remain in Sloping Cliff Horse Farm, that he should have him go to the Mount Song Army headquarters.

Luo Bu saw his hesitant expression and guessed what he was thinking. Smiling, he said, "The demons have already retreated; what's the use in my going to the Mount Song Army headquarters now?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "There will come a day when the demons return."

A streak of admiration appeared in Luo Bu's eyes as he said, "In these past few years, there aren't very many people as clear-minded as you, but...I still will not go to the Mount Song Army headquarters. After a few days, I'll send you off to the Mount Song Army headquarters, and then I will take my leave of this place."

Chen Changsheng asked in concern, "Where are you going?"

Luo Bu replied, "Returning to the mountain."

Chen Changsheng wanted to invite him off the mountain.

But he had begun yearning for that mountain.

Of course, he had always been yearning for that girl on the other mountain.

Chen Changsheng had been spending more than two years doing the same.

It was truly easy to infect others with the emotion that was yearning. There was no need to speak, no need to see each other's eyes.

The stream bank fell quiet once more. For a very long time, neither of them spoke. As they gazed at the barely discernible moonlight in the plains of the north, they silently yearned.

After some time, Luo Bu turned to Chen Changsheng and asked, "Do you also have a girl that you like?"

Chapter 796 – The Starry Sky and Girls (II)

Chen Changsheng nodded and said, "I do, but I haven't met her in a while."

Luo Bu appeared very interested, asking, "She likes you?"

Chen Changsheng felt rather embarrassed as he softly grunted in affirmation.

Luo Bu slightly arched his brow and asked, "If you have a lover, why aren't you seeing her?"

It was clear that he did not approve of Chen Changsheng's way of doing things.

To him, the most difficult part was developing affection, but since they were already lovers, they had to always stay together. It was not allowed for them to separate.

Chen Changsheng thought this question over, then said, "It's not convenient to meet, and also...she has a few rather important things to do."

Luo Bu said no more. Taking a large gulp from the wine pot held in his fingers, he muttered, "Mutual affection...just what sort of feeling is that?"

Chen Changsheng did not hear this clearly and asked, "What?"

"Nothing, just drunken ramblings."

Luo Bu gazed towards the plains at the end of the stream, seemingly seeing that peak which was shrouded in clouds throughout the year, and a faint sadness tinged his face.

From his first glance upon waking, the Luo Bu in Chen Changsheng's eyes had always been elegant and yet indifferent, downtrodden but not unruly. However, he had never once seen Luo Bu like this.

This was a very faint sadness, yet his lush beard was unable to conceal it. Why did his young face appear so ravaged by time?

He truly wished to know Luo Bu's story, to know just what he had experienced.

"I'm a person without a story." Luo Bu very quickly broke out of this mood and offered the wine pot to Chen Changsheng as he indifferently continued, "Because I've lived too smooth a life. Other than a small trouble when I was small, I received everything that I wished for."

Chen Changsheng thought inwardly, then why are you so sad?

"But there are many things in this world that have no relation to your own efforts, like the love between man and woman, or great

matters that decide life or death. No matter how much you struggle or grow, you can never be sure of victory, as these two relationships require a response."

Luo Bu pointed at the numberless stars above and said, "You can say to the starry sky that you don't want to go back, but the starry sky won't answer you. You will grow old, and then die. You can say to a girl 'I love you', but even if you're the best of the best, she just doesn't like you, but what can you do?"

The starry sky and girls would only quietly look back at the viewer, perhaps with pity or sympathy, but when would they ever change their mind?

A starry sky that could randomly change its hue, shape, and rules only existed in the oil paintings of Xuelao City.

Those girls who would implore or strive to be the girl that one loved might also be good girls, but regretfully, they were not the girl that he loved.

'But what can you do?'

This flatly-said question filled Chen Changsheng with a deep anguish.

Perhaps it was because he had once prayed to those infinite stars above to pardon his life.

He somewhat clumsily patted Luo Bu on the shoulder. He wanted to comfort him, but didn't know what to say.

The countless stars twinkled above.

The girl was in the distant south.

Thankfully, he said nothing.

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This chat in the night was very pleasant, and so when Luo Bu returned to his study, he still remained in a fine mood.

In the past few years, he had played the part of teacher and elder in the sect, even when speaking with disciples of the same generation. Moreover, given his knowledge and experience, it was truly difficult to find someone other than Second Brother and Junior Sister that could let him chat so carefreely.

He had originally intended to investigate that person's identity,

but for the sake of this chat over alcohol, he would not care which faction that person belonged to.

It was just a little unfortunate that this fellow truly didn't have much of a stomach for alcohol. He was far inferior to Junior Sister.

Indeed, just who could compare to Junior Sister?

He gazed at his already-emptied bookshelf in a daze for a long time, a bitter smile on his face.

He shook his head, dispelling these thoughts, and continued to pack up his study as he prepared to leave.

He was not lying to that fellow. He was truly prepared to leave and return to the mountain.

Just then, he saw that the secret marks on his desk were different from when he had left, and knew that someone had visited.

He took a letter from the secret compartment in the desk.

It was a letter from home.

The letter recounted a few recent major events in complete and meticulous detail, presenting a version of events even more complete than the highest level of documents in the Ministry of the Army.

His gaze slowly moved across the paper, his sword-like eyebrows gradually rising as if desiring to completely cut away the beard on his face.

His gaze turned colder and colder.

So it turned out that besides Ning Shiwei, Zhu Ye, and Tianhai Zhanyi, people from the Tang clan had also been there that night.

These people had unexpectedly all died, and it was surprisingly because they wanted to snatch away those mysterious Cinnabar Pills.

He was already very used to the behavior of those people in the Great Zhou Imperial Court, but he still felt this act to be very shameless. His lips perked into a scornful smile.

Dying after looking for trouble—was there anything wrong with that?

He continued reading.

And then, he saw the Demon Lord's name.

His expression became rather solemn.

Finally, he saw Chen Changsheng's name.

His expression turned abnormally solemn, his hand stiffening as it clenched the letter.

He raised his head to look out the window, perhaps looking towards the stream bank or that little room in which meat was always stewing.

He thought of the marks left on the cliff, of that unconscious fellow, thought of that conversation by the stream and several details of that conversation...

His complexion changed several times.

At the very beginning, it was a little red, but it did not seem like anger. Soon after, it became a little white, yet it did not seem like he had suffered a shock.

It was more like he had drunk too much alcohol.

Ultimately, all emotions became a slightly bitter smile, brimming with scorn towards himself.

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To drink wine under the stars and talk of girls while drinking

wine—this was something that young men had always enjoyed doing.

In the Orthodox Academy, when Tang Thirty-Six did these things, Chen Changsheng was not willing to accompany him. Only after tonight did he realize that it truly was very pleasant.

He thought, in a few days, when I go to Wenshui to see Tang Thirty-Six, should I bring a few bottles of good alcohol? It could also be considered a thank-you gift to the Tang Old Master for the umbrella.

Of course, chatting over wine and the act of drinking itself primarily depended on who one's partner was.

Chen Changsheng felt that tonight's conversation was very pleasant, even somewhat delightful. This was because his partner in conversation had been Luo Bu.

This made him recall those candlelit conversations with Gou Hanshi, Guan Feibai, and the others in that grass hut in the Mausoleum of Books.

Of course, this chat tonight had reminded him the most of a conversation with Xu Yourong in the snowy temple.

That snowy temple had been on the side of the White Grass Path.

The White Grass Path was in the Plains of the Unsetting Sun.

The Plains of the Unsetting Sun was a part of the Garden of Zhou.

Suddenly, Chen Changsheng came to his senses, purged of any effects from the alcohol.

A few days ago, just after he had awakened from his coma, he felt like he had forgotten something.

Now, he finally remembered.

There were still people in the Garden of Zhou.

He took the strong tea that Nanke had brought over and took a sip, asked her to keep watch for any activity, and then took the string of stone pearls from his wrist.

Of the five stone pearls, one of them was black.

His spiritual sense fell on the black pearl.

In the next moment, he felt a chilly wind on his face.

He was still at the highest point of the Mausoleum of Zhou.

He surveyed his surroundings. The plains had long since regained their former appearance, dyed in a pleasing green.

Suddenly, thunderous roars came from all around the Mausoleum of Zhou and a tide of monsters surged towards him.

In that year, he and that girl had seen a similar sight.

Chapter 797 – Reunion in the Garden of Zhou

Chen Changsheng looked around the Mausoleum of Zhou and very quickly found the people he was searching for.

The figures of An Hua and that deputy general were extremely distinct at the end of the stone path leading up to the mausoleum.

Normally, he would have been able to very quickly charge over there using a movement technique, but now, he could only very slowly climb down.

An Hua and the deputy general noticed him and waved their hands at him. They were also shouting something, most likely reminding him to be careful.

They were rather far away from him, so Chen Changsheng simply could not hear what they were saying. Moreover, the howls and roars of the monsters surrounding the Mausoleum of Zhou were truly too loud.

After some time, he finally reached the end of the stone path.

"Your Holiness!"

An Hua ecstatically prostrated on the ground while the deputy general got down on one knee.

Chen Changsheng indicated that they should stand and apologized, "I'm sorry for making the two of you wait here for so long."

On that night in that garden nestled in the mountains, he was first attacked by Hai Di, and then Nanke and the Demon Lord appeared. At this most perilous of moments, he sent An Hua and the deputy general into the Garden of Zhou. Afterwards, he fell unconscious from his heavy wounds and, upon waking, forgot about them.

Through careful counting, one could determine that An Hua and the deputy general had spent quite a few days in the Garden of Zhou, and he did not know how they had managed to endure.

On that night in the snowy mountains, just when they believed that they would die in the thick Demon Qi, An Hua and the deputy general suddenly discovered that they were in a completely unfamiliar world. They had appeared on an imposing mausoleum, surrounded by a vast and boundless plain populated by many strange beasts that were already on the verge of extinction in the continent.

If they had been able to walk around this world, they might have realized that this was the legendary Garden of Zhou. However, when the monsters discovered the presence of the two humans, they immediately surrounded the Mausoleum of Zhou, making it impossible for the pair to leave. Fortunately, An Hua was carrying a few rations and, having graduated from the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green, was skilled in the Sacred Light technique. The injuries of that deputy general not only did not worsen, but even

gradually improved. However, one could imagine the mental pressure they faced when surrounded by such a ferocious and terrifying tide of monsters.

Only today did they finally see Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng said, "I've come to bring you out."

"For some reason, these monsters haven't entered the mausoleum, but they also won't let us leave."

An Hua looked towards the dense monster tide as she fearfully spoke. In her view, no matter extraordinary the Pope was, he was still alone, and was also very young. It was simply impossible for him to deal with so many terrifying monsters.

Chen Changsheng walked up to the stone path and looked towards the monster tide that seemed to stretch towards the horizon.

After several years, the Garden of Zhou's self-repair was now complete, and the seal on the Plains of the Unsetting Sun no longer existed. The number of monsters had gradually increased and now even exceeded the original number.

Chen Changsheng waved his hand.

Countless howls, some clear and some ruthless, erupted from the mouths of the numberless monsters, sounding just like the

simultaneous explosion of countless claps of thunder.

The deputy general became abnormally nervous and An Hua somewhat paled as she thought, just what is His Holiness planning on doing?

What happened next completely surpassed their imaginations.

The countless monsters prostrated, a ripple spreading through the tide. They seemed extremely docile.

Several thousand gray demon vultures flew in an orderly fashion past the stone platform and then off into the distance.

The monsters gradually dispersed, vanishing into the plains.

In the end, only two gigantic monsters remained. Upon careful examination, one could see a little black dot in front of them.

"Is that the legendary Monster Bull?"

The deputy general looked at the taller of the two monsters and thought of that description he had once read about.

He had already recognized the other giant monster as the Mountain-toppling Fiend, a terrifying existence on the Ranking of Monsters. Although it was rare, in battles against the demons, one might occasionally see the silhouette of this sort of monster from a

distance. As for the Monster Bull, it had truly been many years since it was last seen on the continent.

Chen Changsheng led them out of the Mausoleum of Zhou.

As An Hua thought of the previous scene and looked at his back, her face filled with admiration and reverence.

With a wave from His Holiness, the monster tide dispersed.

Could this be His Holiness's miniature world, just like the Green Leaf World of the Li Palace?

They walked down the mausoleum, passed through the stone plinths which once held the stone monoliths, and came to the White Grass Path.

The weather was excellent, allowing one to see very far, yet it was not possible to see that temple. Perhaps this was because the figure of the Monster Bull was too massive, taking up the entire horizon.

Chen Changsheng looked up at the single eye of the Monster Bull and nodded his head. He then greeted the Mountain-toppling Fiend, after which he looked towards the thing in front of the pair.

An Hua was finally able to make out that the black dot she had seen on the mausoleum was actually a yellowish-brown monster.

This was a very small and thin monster, its fur tattered and its body and limbs damaged. It appeared very pitiful, but for some reason, its eyes gave off a particularly gloomy and frightening feeling. This was the case even when it threw itself before Chen Changsheng and hugged his thigh while constantly muttering something, like some dog kissing up to its master.

The deputy general suddenly thought of a possibility and his face suddenly became incredibly concerned. With a trembling voice, he asked, "This is an Earth Monkey?"

An Hua had originally wanted to treat this monster's injuries, but upon hearing this name, her face instantly paled.

When the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets was drawing up the Ranking of Monsters, a massive argument had broken out about whether to put the Earth Monkey in the rankings and where to rank it. This was because this monster skilled in concealment and hiding in the earth was not actually that strong. It was far inferior to the innately godly might of the Mountain-toppling Fiend, and was certainly not like the Monster Bull, which could fight against a thousand armies. And yet... all cultivators would rather face a Mountain-toppling Fiend or Monster Bull than fight an Earth Monkey alone. This monster was far too intelligent, too sinister and crafty, cold-blooded and cruel.

An Hua and the deputy general were truly unable to associate the fearsome reputation of the Earth Monkey with this yellow dog hugging Chen Changsheng's thigh.

Chen Changsheng affectionately rubbed the Earth Monkey on its head. Through its strange muttering shouts, he came to learn of the recent situation in the Garden of Zhou, but he still did not agree to its request to leave the Garden of Zhou.

He had thought many times about how to deal with the monsters in the plain. He had also discussed with Xu Yourong whether or not he could put those monsters in the plain he had gifted her. After the seal over the Plains of the Unsetting Sun was broken, the monsters did not just restore their numbers, their strength also increased in all aspects, so they were probably capable of living safely. However, the Monster Bull, Mountain-toppling Fiend, and the other monsters on their level had long since grown used to living in the Garden of Zhou. They knew that the outside world was exceptionally dangerous, so they had no intention of leaving.

Although the Earth Monkey was crippled and far weaker than it had been in the past, it still wanted to go outside and look around. To the Earth Monkey, the word 'danger' was the sweetest honey, yet Chen Changsheng refused to let it leave the Garden of Zhou. Part of his refusal was out of concern for its safety and the other part was out of concern for the safety of the outside world.

The Earth Monkey somewhat resentfully rubbed against his thigh, but did not continue to nag him, much less dare to show any hatred in its eyes. It didn't even appear disappointed. Using its two forelimbs to support its crippled body, it climbed back up to the coiled horns of the Mountain-toppling Fiend and very obediently waved its hands at Chen Changsheng.

Chapter 798 – Yes, Your Holiness

An Hua and the deputy general watched speechlessly as the Monster Bull and the Mountain-toppling Fiend slowly made their way into the depths of the plains.

Everything they had seen upon coming to this world was simply too shocking.

The deputy general recalled how he had once heard some fellow say that the Demon Commander enjoyed sitting between the coiled horns of a Mountain-toppling Fiend.

But in the Pope's world, even a crippled Earth Monkey could sit in the same place.

"General, might I know your name?"

A voice broke his stunned recollections.

He turned around and saw that Chen Changsheng was looking at him. He hurriedly responded, "This lowly general is called Chen Chou."

Chen Changsheng asked, "General Chen, I am very interested in a certain matter. When you decided to go to Gaoyang Village, were you not worried that your superiors would accuse you of absconding from your duties?"

Chen Chou bitterly smiled as he answered, "I'm a disgraced general from Seven Li Xi that was transferred to the Mount Song Army headquarters. I originally had nothing to do, so I thought it would be fine to try and save a person. I didn't expect to encounter so many troubles."

Chen Changsheng felt that the name of Seven Li Xi was very familiar, but he did not think about it too much.

He greatly admired this general called Chen Chou, both for the risks he had taken to send an array master to Gaoyang to seek medical aid, and for the bravery and resolve he had shown in front of those experts. He asked, "What about now? Do you still plan on returning to the Mount Song Army headquarters for work?"

Chen Chou was somewhat confused, asking, "Your Holiness means?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "If you go to the Mount Song Army headquarters and become Divine General, presumably no one will leave you without things to do."

Chen Chou froze, and only began to slowly emerge from his stupor with An Hua's gentle voice. Wearing a perplexed expression, he pointed at himself and asked, "I return to the Mount Song Army headquarters and become Divine General?"

Chen Changsheng affirmed, "Correct."

Chen Chou found this idea completely ridiculous. He couldn't help but bitterly smile and shake his head. "If this were before I was transferred, if I were still commanding general of the roaming cavalry, and perhaps if I fought on the frontlines for another ten years, accumulating merit and increasing my strength, perhaps I truly might have a chance at that position in the Mount Song Army headquarters. But now..."

Right now, he was just a deputy general, the lowest-ranking general. He was separated by a full six ranks from the position of Divine General, so was there anything even worth talking about?

In the end, he just sighed.

He had always felt that his father had chosen a poor name for him.

[Chen Chou, Chen Chou](#), achieving merit but no rewards, only having them slowly mold in the records.

How else could that fellow be transferred to Sloping Cliff while he ended up in a place like this?

Chen Changsheng suddenly realized that he didn't know what to say next.

If that friend of his were here instead of Wenshui City, perhaps everything would have become much simpler.

That friend would assuredly pat Chen Chou on the shoulder and heroically declare, "Who is Chen Changsheng? If he says you can do it, then even if you can't do it, you can still do it."

This was precisely the reasoning, but Chen Changsheng could not bring himself to say such words.

Fortunately, there was still another person present.

An Hua walked in front of Chen Chou and quietly whispered a few things to him.

Only then did Chen Chou remember that the person who wanted him to be Divine General was not some swindling priest from a small church, or one of those avaricious secretaries of the Ministry of the Army, but the Pope!

His eyes brightened, but then quickly became confused and turbulent with emotion.

An Hua knew that this was the response after one's mind had been dealt a heavy blow, and smiled as she shook her head. She paid him no more mind and returned to Chen Changsheng.

The Li Palace had never involved itself in government affairs, and in the past few years, it had been particularly inconspicuous.

Logically speaking, even if Chen Changsheng was the Pope, he could not casually arrange for a person to become Divine General

of the Mount Song Army.

Moreover, just as Chen Chou said, he was clearly not the ideal candidate, lacking in both seniority and backing.

But to An Hua, this was not a question that even needed thinking about.

From the snowy mountains to this world, from the origins of the Cinnabar Pill to dispersing the monster tide with the wave of his sleeve, the image of Chen Changsheng in her heart had continued to grow until it had become supremely divine and imposing.

She was currently Chen Changsheng's most loyal believer and follower.

To put it another way, if Chen Changsheng were to right now tell her that the sun would rise from the west tomorrow morning, she would definitely wait the entire night just to look upon the horizon. If she realized that the sun was still rising from the east, she would then contemplate whether she had heard wrongly or was looking in the wrong direction.

"Return with Chen Chou to the Mount Song Army headquarters."

Chen Changsheng said to her, "I will write a letter for you to carry. In addition, I have a few other matters that I need to trouble you with."

An Hua felt flattered to be given this honor of carrying out a mission for the Pope, but she also felt a massive pressure, as if she was standing in front of an abyss. Her voice shaking, she said, "Yes, Your Holiness."

Chen Changsheng examined her face, finding it rather familiar. With a sudden idea, he asked, "What is your relationship with Archbishop An Lin?"

An Hua became even more humble as she softly responded, "Archbishop An Lin is my aunt on my father's side."

Chen Changsheng did not pursue the topic. Whether the Orthodoxy or the Imperial Court, they were all assembled from relationships between people, so there was no need to speak more of it.

His gaze moved up the White Grass Path, but he still did not see that temple. He thought to himself, was it destroyed when that shard of the sky fell down? When I have the time, I should check it out. He then confirmed that the things he had left here were still intact. Feeling that there was no more need to stay, he brought An Hua and Chen Chou out.

The wind between the mountains was somewhat colder. The stars in the night sky quietly watched the three people by the stream.

An Hua and Chen Chou did not have any experience in spatial transition, so they could not help but be a little dazzled and absent-

mined. They needed some time before finally being able to calm back down.

"Your Holiness, where are we?" An Hua asked.

Chen Changsheng replied, "Sloping Cliff Horse Farm. That road leads to the Mount Song Army headquarters. The next courier station is twenty-four li out. I am sorry for troubling you like this."

Upon hearing 'Sloping Cliff Horse Farm', Chen Chou seemed a little surprised. He looked towards the sparsely lit barracks and thought, could that fellow be here?

An Hua finally could no longer restrain her question, "Your Holiness, the world that you placed us in to save us... where was it?"

Chen Chou also could not help but look over. He also wanted to know the answer, but he was also a little nervous.

Chen Changsheng considered the question, then answered, "You guessed correctly. That place was the Garden of Zhou and that mausoleum was the Mausoleum of Zhou."

Upon having their most burning question answered and confirming that they had passed the last few days in that legendary place, An Hua and Chen Chou felt very satisfied.

Since there was no more reason to stay, they parted.

"Your Holiness, please take care of your health for the sake of all the believers in the world."

After watching those two figures disappear into the darkness, Chen Changsheng fell quiet for a very long time.

He had done many things in the years after leaving the capital, but it was tonight, when he requested An Hua and Chen Chou to complete those two tasks on his behalf, that he truly began.

In the past few years, he acted according to his martial uncle the Pope's plan, acted according to that agreement made on that snowy night in the Orthodox Academy, and concealed his identity as he traveled the world, silently improving himself. But it seemed that his master and many more people still did not trust in his silence.

He had been silent, but no matter how silent he was, he was still the Pope.

He already had the unconditional trust and loyalty of countless believers, just like An Hua.

Then he should bear without conditions the burdens he should bear.

In the name of the Pope.

The name Chen Chou consists of the words '陈' and '酬'. '酬' means 'reward' while '陈旧' means 'old-fashioned'.

Chapter 799 – Spring Wind Greens the Two Shores

The Daoist faith was the Orthodoxy of the Great Zhou, but it was not merely the Great Zhou's Orthodoxy. Long before the Great Zhou was founded, the Daoist faith had been the Orthodoxy for many dynasties.

The Pope wielded the divine authority of the Orthodoxy, and was the common master of all the believers in the world. From a certain perspective, the Pope had an even higher status than a sovereign.

How could one be a good Pope?

Chen Changsheng was well-versed in the Daoist Canon and had read about the deeds of countless Popes, but this was not something that could be taught.

Perhaps it was precisely for this reason that his martial uncle the Pope had never once taught him how to be a Pope, only attempted to influence him through words and actions.

Such lessons included placing the world above all, being patient and biding one's time, acting cautiously, not caring for a momentary loss, disregarding a slanderous reputation that might last for all ages, and working for the sake of all living things.

After leaving the capital, he, like many other young cultivators,

went straight to the north, planning to contribute his strength to the battlefield. However, reality proved that he was of no use here. On the contrary, his presence on the frontlines was liable to cause chaos and shake the morale of the soldiers. As a result, he began to use his medical arts to save people, refining the Cinnabar Pill. He truly had saved many people, but it was still not enough.

In his notebook, Wang Zhice had said that positions were relative. In different positions, one naturally needed to choose different ways of doing things. He was currently the Pope, so if he wanted to make a contribution to this world, he could not act like a swordsman or doctor. He had to use different methods.

Su Li had decided that it was beneath him to associate with this dark and rotten world, or even look at it. If he was stained by its dust, he would use his sword to chop it away. The Tianhai Divine Empress, on the other hand, had used even darker and crueller methods of suppression, attempting to completely expel that rotten air, while his martial uncle the Pope had been gentler and more conservative.

In Chen Changsheng's view, all these methods were wrong.

He could not be like his martial uncle, continuously yielding for the sake of the bigger picture and willing to sacrifice himself. He was also not so estranged from this world as Senior Su Li. Although this world had no kindness for him, he still liked this world and the people living within it. He naturally could not do as the Tianhai Divine Empress did. After reading Wang Zhice's notebook in the Lingyan Pavilion, he had abandoned any desire to have the world dance to his whims.

His method, his way of doing things, was truthfully rather simple.

Since he did not want to submissively allow this world to be given over to those rotten and uninteresting people, he should stand up.

Just like how the spring wind greened the shores of the river, how wildflowers filled the mountain slopes: fair and aboveboard, upright and frank, making a declaration to the world.

If he were just by himself, it would naturally be very difficult. Fortunately, he had many peers, companions.

If that fellow had been willing to join him, it would have been even better. Alas, just why had he been so unwilling to leave the mountain?

Chen Changsheng gazed up at the distant room still lit by lanterns, and wondered what Luo Bu was thinking.

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The demons had truly retreated, leaving no traps and making no efforts to preserve any of their gains. From the northern reaches of

Tianliang County to the western foothills of Mount Han, an area spanning a circle of around two thousand li in radius was completely devoid of demons. Their only presence was two squadrons of wolf cavalry on the banks of the Lahu River, most likely to keep watch on the human army.

Many people were still perplexed over why the demons had withdrawn, but regardless, in every aspect, this was still a victory for the Human race. The ten-some army headquarters of the snowy plains in the north and the even more numerous strongholds began to celebrate, and relaxed smiles appeared on the faces of the people as if they were enjoying a festival.

The mood at the Mount Song Army headquarters was different from elsewhere. It was tense and oppressive, the two sides of its main street packed with people. The faces of the soldiers, merchants, and the small number of commoners were all covered in apprehension and anxiety. They were standing here not to celebrate the retreat of the demons, but to wait for the results of an investigation.

In the past few days, a succession of carriages had entered the Mount Song Army headquarters. Some carriages had come from Blue Pass and Snowhold Pass, others had come from Hanqiu City, and some of them had even come from the distant capital. Each carriage represented a truly important personage.

Because Ning Shiwei had died.

One night, he had brought his bodyguards and left his post, vanishing from sight. Later on, when his body was recovered, it

was in an unbearably gruesome state. The crucial problem was that he had not died on the battlefield, but in an extremely remote mountain range.

A Divine General had died in a bizarre fashion. An investigation was naturally required.

The soldiers, merchants, and commoners packing the street also wanted to know what was going on.

They had no idea that many more people had died on that night. Zhu Ye, the newly appointed leader of the Zhu clan, Tianhai Zhanyi, the second-generation descendant nurtured by the Tianhai clan, and the Tang Seventeenth Master had, just like Ning Shiwei, died on that harshly cold night.

With the deaths of so many important people, it was only natural that even more important people would be needed to come and investigate.

Two Divine Generals had come respectively from Snowhold Pass and Blue Pass, and the Tianhai clan had sent a truly prestigious figure: Tianhai Chenwen, younger brother to Tianhai clan head Tianhai Chenwu. Yet not even he was the person at the Mount Song Army headquarters with the highest status today, as the Prince of Zhongshan, acting as imperial envoy for the court, had hurried over from the capital. The Zhu clan of Tianliang County, having suffered the successive deaths of two clan heads, was now bereft of any strong individuals and had suffered a severe decline in power, so they had randomly sent a person who would presumably only have the right to listen in during the

investigation.

The first priority of these important figures in coming to the Mount Song Army headquarters was naturally to investigate why Ning Shiwei and all those other people had died, but more important was that position.

The position of Divine General of the Mount Song Army.

When the Divine Empress reigned, although the war with the demons did not proceed very smoothly, the military was still not inferior to its peak, having thirty-eight Divine Generals in total. During the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, the renowned Divine Generals Xue Xingchuan and Tian Chui had died, and then there was the equally intense internal strife in the court. When the storms died away, only twenty-three Divine Generals remained.

The capital and Luoyang required Divine Generals to oversee them, decreasing the number of Divine Generals that could be left in the north.

Currently, besides Snowhold Pass and Blue Pass, which had special status, the remaining military headquarters on the snowy plains had only one Divine General each. With Ning Shiwei's death, the position of Divine General of the Mount Song Army had become vacant, and it was not possible to transfer a Divine General from another army. This meant that the Imperial Court needed to appoint a new Divine General.

To the Great Zhou Army and the Imperial Court, the position of

Divine General was one of the most critical.

Divine Generals had military authority, and were even endowed with the power to move troops without orders at critical junctures.

Regardless of the reason for Ning Shiwei's death, since there was now a vacancy, a new Divine General would be promoted. Not the Prince of Xiang's faction, the Tianhai clan, or any other faction in the court could miss this opportunity.

In the depths of the winter, no snow was falling over the Mount Song Army headquarters, yet a thick layer of dark clouds sat above the town and fort constructed in the mountains, and the light was very cold.

A similar expression could be seen on the faces of the important personages seated in the main hall of the army headquarters.

The Prince of Zhongshan sat in the middle. Just as was rumored, his face was suffused with a ruthless aura.

Tianhai Chenwen and Divine General Jian Xi of Snowhold Pass sat to his right.

To his left were the high official from the Grand Court of Revision who had come together with the Prince of Zhongshan, and Divine General Cheng Tao of Blue Pass.

The factions were plainly evident, as were their standpoints, or

else the mood in the main hall would not have been so oppressive and gloomy.

Divine General Cheng Tao looked at the leading officer of Gaoyang Village and shouted with a very unpleasant expression, "The commanding general came to your camp, and yet you know nothing?"

Chapter 800 – Wildflowers Assault Mount Song

The leading officer of Gaoyang Village kneeled on the floor and kowtowed repeatedly, clueless as to what he should say.

Because he truly did not know anything.

An impatient expression appeared on the Prince of Zhongshan's face, and he waved his hand to dismiss the officer.

The hall once more fell into silence, with nobody speaking for a very long time.

No explicit decree had been issued from the palace, indicating that Daoist Master Shang Xingzhou had no favored candidate for the Divine General of the Mount Song Army. The factions of the court were free to fight over it.

The princes naturally wanted this position. It was said that even the Prince of Xiang, who had secluded himself for more than a year in preparation to break into the Divine Domain, had voiced his opinion.

The Tianhai clan's present situation was rather awkward. Although they had strenuously worked to use their relationship with the emperor to firm up their position, it was not convenient for them to act too excessively, as they did not want to stir the Daoist master's ire. They were gradually being pushed to the

margins of the Imperial Court, so they could not let this chance go.

Everyone wanted this position, but nobody wanted to speak first.

Moreover, they were all unsettled by the fact that though the Tang Seventeenth Master had clearly died on that night, the Tang clan had not sent anybody. If the Tang clan truly wished to use this matter to gain the position of Divine General of the Mount Song Army, then given their relationship with the palace, the people present truly did not have the confidence to fight with them.

"There are a few matters that everyone here is well aware of, but we should still go through the process. After all, the Imperial Court still needs to be given some face."

The Prince of Zhongshan, appearing increasingly impatient, ignored everyone else and indicated that the official from the Grand Court of Revision should continue his summary of the investigation.

The official glanced at his file, then suddenly asked in surprise, "There were people that survived that night?"

The people in the hall were somewhat taken by surprise at this revelation, thinking, did the Demon Lord not kill them all?

The Prince of Zhongshan also appeared rather interested, asking, "Why was this not mentioned before?"

The official looked through the file again, confirming that he had not misunderstood. He whispered to the prince, "According to what these two people said, they were knocked unconscious by the ripples of the battle. They only woke up a few days later, after which they crossed the mountains to return, so no one knew that they were still alive."

The Prince of Zhongshan raised his brows and said, "Interesting; bring them in for questioning."

After a while, a girl dressed in the ceremonial robes of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green and a middle-aged man dressed in military uniform entered the hall.

It was precisely An Hua and Chen Chou, who had returned from Sloping Cliff Horse Farm to the Mount Song Army headquarters a few days ago.

"State your identities."

"An Hua, Teacher of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green."

"Chen Chou, Deputy General of the Mount Song Army headquarters."

The mood in the main hall palpably relaxed upon hearing the identities of these two.

To these powerful figures, a trifling deputy general was not even

worth mentioning. Her relation to the Li Palace might make An Hua a bit more difficult to deal with, but it was still not a big deal. In short, this pair were not people that they had no means of controlling.

"Describe what you saw tonight. Speak earnestly. Not a single lie is permitted."

The Prince of Zhongshan expressionlessly looked at the pair and warned, "In the records, you two should be deceased. Now you have returned to life, but if there's a problem with your continued survival, then this prince will not mind having you die again."

As he felt the cold gazes of these important figures, Chen Chou felt that he had returned to that cold night, surrounded by demon wolf cavalry.

He was keenly aware that what he was about to say would offend these important figures, even offend the entire Imperial Court.

But since he had already promised, he had to do it, as he was a soldier of the Great Zhou.

He took a deep breath as he prepared himself to step forward.

But another person had moved faster.

An Hua stood by his side and gazed at the Prince of Zhongshan, Tianhai Chenwen, and all the other important figures as she

reported, "In the autumn of the third year of the new era, I and General Chen Chou brought a dying young array master to Gaoyang Village. We had received information that the owner of the Cinnabar Pill might be there."

Her voice was very calm, clear, and at ease.

She recounted the story from Gaoyang to the siege of the lake, which was only the start of that night, but a conclusion could already be drawn.

"Zhu Ye, Ning Shiwei, and Tianhai Zhanyi died because they wanted to assassinate the owner of the Cinnabar Pill and seize it for themselves, but they did not expect that the Demon Lord was not dead. In order to cure his injuries, he had also come to the mountains to seek out the owner of the Cinnabar Pill. The two sides met, resulting in all their deaths."

All the important personages present were already aware that Zhu Ye and the others truly had died at the Demon Lord's hands.

They had come to make this on-site investigation primarily due to Bie Yanghong's judgment. However, they had been unable to form an accurate picture, as everyone involved had died.

They had their conjectures as to what Zhu Ye and the others had intended to do in that mountain range, but this was the first time they had it confirmed by a witness.

It truly was about the Cinnabar Pill.

The Prince of Zhongshan glanced at Divine General Cheng Tao.

Divine General Cheng Tao imperceptibly nodded.

The Prince of Zhongshan became slightly sterner. It truly was that matter they had discussed in their letters last time.

The powerful figures in the capital all knew of the Cinnabar Pill, had all attempted to make this wondrous medicine their own.

"Without discussing the veracity of your account, even if this is the case, you cannot cast aspersions on the dead. What assassination? And this vain attempt to seize the pill?"

A low and deep voice spoke, owned by Tianhai Chenwen.

Tianhai Zhanyi was his son, so he naturally could not permit his son to carry such a stigma after his death.

If they wanted to gain the position of Divine General of the Mount Song Army, they could not have a single aspect that could be easily criticized.

The other important personages very quickly came to understand that Tianhai Zhanyi, Zhu Ye, or Ning Shiwei could have died in a heroic battle or died by falling from the mountain path, but they

absolutely could not die like this.

Divine General Jian Xi impassively added, "That's right, Divine General Ning Shiwei was carrying out a mission. He cannot be criticized for that."

The Prince of Zhongshan once more revealed a hint of impatience. Waving his hand, he said, "Let's get straight to the point: did you personally see them being killed by the Demon Lord?"

An Hua shook her head, answering, "We were still in the garden and were not able to personally witness it, but we did hear the Demon Lord personally admit to the deed."

Even though that legendary Demon Lord's death was already confirmed, none of the great personages present had the bravery to accuse him of lying.

The Prince of Zhongshan asked, "Based on your account, the master of the Cinnabar Pill was also present?"

An Hua calmly answered, "Yes."

The Prince of Zhongshan stared into her eyes and asked, "How did he die?"

A few people leaned slightly forward at this question, seeming especially focused.

In their view, since the Demon Lord had appeared, that person had assuredly died, but they wanted to know where the recipe to the Cinnabar Pill had ended up...

An Hua replied, "He did not die."

The Prince of Zhongshan raised his brow. "What did you say?"

An Hua calmly met his gaze and said, "He did not die."

The Prince of Zhongshan harshly exclaimed, "Everyone died, but you two are still alive and that person is still alive? Do you take this prince for a fool!?"

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